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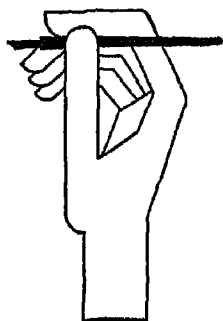
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WYNDHAM LEWIS

Self-portrait, 1921



Wyndham Lewis

BY HUGH KENNER

THE MAKERS OF MODERN LITERATURE

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*This book is for
John Reid, .
preceptor and catalyst*

NOTE

I HAD BETTER MAKE IT CLEAR THAT THIS BOOK IS NOT A biography but an account of a career, and that the Wyndham Lewis that figures in it, not always resplendently, is a personality informing a series of books and paintings, not the London resident of the same name who created that personality and may be inadequately described as its business manager and amanuensis. The personality in question evinces such unusual acumen and "presence" that it has often been mistaken for a person, but because its principles of operation are dazzlingly, mechanically logical it lies open to a kind of discussion which would be both impertinent and inaccurate applied to a human being.

It is customary in writing on this subject to warn the reader against confusing the man Wyndham Lewis with yet another namesake, Mr. D. B. Wyndham Lewis, who has also written books, though he does not, so far as I know, paint pictures.

WYNDHAM LEWIS

I am grateful to John Reid for lengthy and indispensable correspondence, to Marvin Mudrick for the spur of aware conversation, and to Kenneth Millar for his patience in expunging flaws from the manuscript. I must also thank the editors of *The Hudson Review* for permission to reprint the portions of this book that appeared there. To Mr. Thomas H. Carter, who edited the Wyndham Lewis issue of *Shenandoah*, I owe a more complex debt; he not only encouraged me to make use of what I wrote for him, but freed me to write the book by shelving a somewhat different project of his own.

The self-portrait of Wyndham Lewis is reproduced by permission of the artist and the Manchester City Art Gallery.

—HUGH KENNER

*Santa Barbara College,
Santa Barbara, California*

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It may have been because this very complex and sensitive man was so responsive to the claims of violence—because he had made it so much his own—that he understood its opposite as well as he did. The notion of domination, and of the struggle for domination, obsessed him. But he was also obsessed by the refinements of the intellect which cannot co-exist with the struggle for existence.

—Wyndham Lewis on Nietzsche

P R E F A C E

"What is the use of your talking me to the play,
if you suppress the plot?"

—*The Childermass*

"WYNDHAM LEWIS, THE MAN WHO WAS WRONG ABOUT EVERY-
thing except the superiority of live mind to dead mind; for
which basic verity God bless his holy name."—thus Ezra
Pound's summary appraisal of his long-time friend and
associate. He is one of the great painters of the twentieth
century—in the perhaps unguarded judgment of Walter
Sickert "the greatest portraitist who ever lived." He has
written *The Revenge for Love*, a twentieth-century classic;
Tarr, "the first book of an epoch," a novel of great sporadic
power; and *Time and Western Man*, one of the key books
for the student of modern thought. Yet so much achieve-
ment seems less than that of several other contemporaries,
and less than would seem to be promised by a career of
ceaseless intellectual activity that since 1909 has spawned
—almost as by-products—forty books and countless pic-
tures. It is not wholly because of boycott (though he has

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been boycotted steadily by one clique or another ever since he first became known) that his name does not come as readily to the reviewer's pen as, say, that of Eliot, who once called him "the most fascinating personality of our time." It is because, perhaps, his career itself has more meaning—though it doesn't come to more—than any of its manifestations. It even holds in thrall his undoubtable successes: for all their vitality ("so great a realist that he makes you shiver" said Ford Madox Ford of the author of *Tarr*) they don't so much possess their own life as bring to unusual articulation at critical points the continuing drama of Wyndham Lewis's war with Time and Self—as significant an assault on the *néant* as that of Swift.

"Not a commentator but a protagonist," Pound wrote of him nearly four decades ago. "He is a man at war. . . . You cannot be as intelligent, in that sort of way, without being prey to the furies."

No historian's model of the age of Joyce, Eliot, and Pound is intelligible without Lewis in it. More than any of these men, whose craft functioned with comparative freedom within the time, Lewis reveals the time's *nature*. He does this as much by disregarding nearly everything the artist is officially supposed to undertake, as by succeeding—so far as he has succeeded—in what he chose to do instead. Afoot in the void, his savagely energetic intelligence hunting down chimerical images of itself not only enacts in a dream-play the suicide of the West, but demonstrates the ubiquity of the illusions into which more fortunate intelligences have from time to time barely succeeded in not being betrayed.

It hasn't been safe for men of letters to think since the
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PREFACE

seventeenth century, when ideas were substituted for things as the accredited materials of thought. In the teeth of the respected view that the artist expresses the emotional equivalent of whatever thought happens to be going on, Lewis has denounced a conspiracy against the mind and asserted that when official thinking is in bad shape the artist must do his own. It is with his creative mind that he has thought, however: hence the bustle with which he has reared so many scaffoldings. If Lewis has stood for intelligence rather than intuition, for creation rather than craftsmanship, for Western Man rather than his daemon the *Zeitgeist*, without ever personifying any of these things quite convincingly, yet even in illustrating the radical incapacity of will alone to do the work of patience, he has discredited the spuriousness we meticulously reward.

"If so you be the authenticated sage
Of our epoch, why aren't you all the rage?"—
"Because, old mole, 'the rage' is in your keeping:
Because '*the rage*' *c'est moi*! With Warwick Deeping
You do your work, or the late Galsworthy, you see.
Because you are so the man to boost the flea!"—

He is the necessary antidote to everything, from Freud and Lawrence to the cults which have surrounded Eliot and Joyce.

"A kettle is not so fine as a man," he once wrote; "this is a challenge to the kettles." Drunk with this truth, which in fact few people have really arrived at believing, Lewis set out over forty years ago to make things seem less real than himself. The subsequent drama, in which the kettles are not wholly vindicated, is itself the story he never quite cared to write.

PART I THE WAR WITH TIME

We must have the Past and the Future, Life simple, that is, to discharge ourselves in, and keep us pure for non-life, that is Art.

—Wyndham Lewis, *Blast*, No. 1

1. THE MAN FROM NOWHERE

THE WYNDHAM LEWIS OF SUBSEQUENT LEGEND MATERIALIZED one day in 1909 on the stairway at 84 Holland Park Avenue, London. Mr. Ford Madox Ford—then Hueffer—was at the top of the stairs, pink and aghast that his privacy and his luncheon with the original of Christopher Tietjens should be invaded by a silent steeple-hatted figure wearing a huge black cape. The figure mounted the stairs, saying nothing. From beneath the cape it produced and flourished crumpled rolls of manuscript, which it pressed into Ford's unnerved hands. More wads of paper appeared from beneath the hat, from inside the waistcoat, from the pockets of the long-tailed coat. Ford numbly accepted them. All the time the figure said nothing. At last it went slowly down the stairs, without a word, and vanished.

Ford, if he was the last Pre-Raphaelite, was also a great editor; he printed in subsequent numbers of *The English Review* the prose sketches decipherable on those sibylline

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sheets. The first¹ was an account of certain "Poles" who gulled the bourgeois landladies of Breton watering-places by pretending to be artists. (Rumors of the dealer Vollard's prices for stray Gauguins had recently made "artist" a magic word in the provinces.) Having exiled himself from the Slavic world because he had run out of money, the "Pole" (who was usually really a Russian) selected a victim and, disguised as a noble in suede gloves, paid three months' board in advance. After that he paid no more, and battenning on the inscrutable Breton hospitality, became a gentle and mysterious parasite.

This mystery man without a past had before him in 1909 a lively future. He is the Wyndham Lewis protagonist, who arrives out of nowhere onto the pages of the book: successively Kreisler in *Tarr*, Ker-Orr in *The Wild Body*, Zagreus in *The Apes of God*, Kell-Imrie in *Snooty Baronet*, Hardcaster in *The Revenge for Love*, and Vincent Penhale in *The Vulgar Streak*. Even in his one first-person novel, Lewis takes pains to conjure his "I" into the book with a maximum of assertiveness. Having for a page and a half described a man's face and extracted the man from a taxi ("Then stealthily there issued from its door, erect and with a certain brag in his carriage, a black-suited six-footer, a dollar-bill between his teeth, drawing off large driving-gauntlets"), the narrator-hero of *Snooty Baronet* asserts,

The face was mine. I must apologize for arriving as it were incognito upon the scene.

This black-suited six-footer with a certain brag in his car-

¹ "The Pole," *English Review*, July 1909.

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riage is a 1932 incarnation of the "Pole" of 1909 and the most virtuosic master of the Lewisian vocabulary of dramatic gestures; he only apologizes because he is also the first of Lewis's clubman-personae of the thirties. Horace Zagreus (1930) broke in upon his fellow-apes with a less studied éclat:

"I suppose no one else is coming?"

"Not so far as I know—no, no one but Mr. Rogers, unless her ladyship has anyone coming."

"She didn't mention that she had."

The door opened as though to swallow the room. A small man in black was first revealed holding it by the handle.

"Mr. Zackroost sir, to see you."

A tall figure eclipsed at once the body-servant of the invalid baronet, and

Zagreus is an especially schematized paradigm. Within a few pages of his sudden appearance, he performs the other ritual action of the Lewis hero: he disowns his past. The past, as he is shepherding his protégé Daniel Boleyn through London traffic, manifests itself on the opposite sidewalk and, despite Zagreus's attempt at evasive tactics, succeeds in confronting him in the shape of a puffed little man with a thinning tan. After a page of frosty conversation—

"Well goodbye!" Horace exclaimed hastily.

"Is that all?" . . .

"Run away Francis like a good boy!" said Horace firmly as he turned away, while, strong in the emanations of the unhealthy days of long-ago, the old companion's claim to recognition for things dead and gone thrust on him its cruel caricature.

Rejoining Boleyn, Horace Zagreus swept away at a gallop. . . .

"That is an awful man!" at last he remarked.

Like the "Pole," the Lewis protagonist dabbles in some mode of creation, or exists on the fringe of an art world: Zagreus is a specialist in "genius," Kreisler an art student, Percy a manipulator of Chelsea pinkos, Penhale reputed to be a fashionable designer. Like the "Pole's," his means of support are either exiguous or invisible: the crisis of *The Vulgar Streak* turns on the discovery that Penhale exists by passing counterfeit money. Like the "Pole," he is a figure of melodrama who imposes a vibrating reality by permitting us to see around him a little. We are made aware that we are meant to accept his opinions, however bizarre, as diagrams of a richer and saner *bizarrerie* off-stage. Sometimes he seems aware that he is being read about, and busies himself, like Kreisler or Penhale, disowning a past the better to assemble his energies for sustaining what he would have us take him for in the present. Sometimes, having mobilized his forces before the curtain goes up, he arrives by fiat from Mars, like the apparition on Ford's stairs, inhibiting questions with aggressive implacability. "I have never," Ford recalled, "known anyone else whose silence was a positive rather than a negative quantity": and the Lewis protagonist can impose himself on the reader with the aplomb of that phantom.

It is a profound intuition of how best to make himself seem real that inspires this impostor to maintain his knowing relationship with the art world. It is his way of maintaining contact with his creator, who holds art to be the mirror of Self, and Self in reverence as the one thing real, wrung from the void by will. As Zagreus in *The Apes of God* "broadcasts" the opinions of the omniscient but invisible Pierpoint, so the Lewis protagonist more or less

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clumsily imitates Wyndham Lewis, painter and mystery man, who placed the personae of his early paintings in a moon landscape, argued in 1914 that England was a suitable place for creative artists to work *because* it was a cultural desert, and has spoken, in a chapter called "The Case Against Roots," of feeling at home in America's "wholly excellent vacuum" because "no one really belongs there more than I do."

"All personality is raceless," he has written; ". . . for the characteristic work of personality is to overcome the mechanical ascendancy of what is imposed on it by birth and environment. So, since it illustrates itself essentially by triumph over race, class and fashion, these things are rather what it is *not*, than what it *is*. . . . In Shakespeare's case there is less temptation than in that of almost anybody to occupy ourselves with where he came from."

Taking this cue, perhaps, Lewis has written two autobiographical books without so much as divulging his birthplace. In the first of these, in fact, he comes onstage at thirty and drops the curtain at forty-two. The books of reference say "Nova Scotia, 1884." Another account, said to be quasi-authorized, has it that he was born "in Canadian waters on an American yacht in the Bay of Fundy of an English mother" and hints at thunder and lightning. On the third page of *Blasting and Bombardiering* he writes with disarming aplomb,

Let me, however, formally introduce myself. I am just as genial a character as Mr. Bernard Shaw, to give you an idea. I am rather what Mr. Shaw would have been like if he had been an artist—I here use "artist" in the widest possible sense—if he had not been an Irishman, if he had been a young man when the Great War

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occurred, if he had studied painting and philosophy instead of economics and Ibsen, and if he had been more richly endowed with imagination, emotion, intellect and a few other things. (He said he was a finer fellow than Shakespeare. I merely prefer myself to Mr. Shaw.) . . .

I will go over my credentials. I am an artist—if that is a credential. I am a novelist, painter, sculptor, philosopher, draughtsman, critic, politician, journalist, essayist, pamphleteer, all rolled into one, like one of those portmanteau-men of the Italian Renaissance.

Though Lewis here appears at his most engaging, the stress remains not on what has been but on what uncompromisingly *is*. The strategy of excluding the past from view so as to enhance the sensationalism of the present has often, during his forty-five years' career, commended itself to the painter who, regarding art as "a civilized substitute for magic," is forwardly conscious of the way the painter's activity takes no account of Time.

The magician's gestures owe their meaning to the fact that the rabbit from the hat—like the story from the cape—has no history. More flamboyantly than his irritation with roots, Lewis's manifestation on the stairway was part of a war with Time—especially with the time past that his heroes emphatically disown—a war which underlies every manifestation of his genius, from the galvanic absolutism of his prose syntax (which, at its most characteristic, works by systematic denial of the existence of sequence) to his heroic studio portraits of the late 1930's, in which certain men existing in time—Eliot, Spender—are transformed into looming *objects* on which "a sort of immortality descends. . . . It is an immortality which, in the case of the painting, they have to pay for with death, or at least with its coldness and immobility."

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It is a Lewis axiom that we cannot see what is before our eyes. "The Present can only be revealed to people when it has become Yesterday"; in fact, "There is no Present—there is Past and Future, and there is Art." Hence "The production of a work of art is, I believe, strictly the work of a visionary. . . . If you say that creative art is a spell, a talisman, an incantation—that it is *magic*, in short, there, too, I believe you would be correctly describing it." So the Artist is a man at war with Time, inhabiting the invisible point between Past and Future, and the Lewis protagonist is his melodramatic Ape.

2. PLOT AND PERSONA

THE PERSON AT WAR WITH TIME OCCUPIES A METAPHYSICAL position replete with bitter energy, "up here on the world's brink"; we find its elements in the other two early stories proffered on Ford's stairs from under the cape of the apparition: "Les Saltimbanques" and "Bestre."

The saltimbanques Lewis observed in Brittany. They are prototypes for the bleakest of the artist-allotropes that inhabit his mind. If you haul the Lewisian artist down into visibility, you find that, being human, he doesn't quite believe in his lonely role (hence his interest in simulacra who manage to corrupt its austerity with a gratifying ration of vulgar power) and that consequently in his creative activities, behind which the mind cannot quite mobilize itself, there is an element of compulsiveness. "In a painting certain forms **MUST** be SO; in the same meticulous, profound manner that your pen or book must lie on the

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table at a certain angle, your clothes at night be arranged in a set personal symmetry, certain birds be avoided, a set of railings tapped with your hand as you pass, without missing one." The Breton acrobats' performance is a bitter irrational ritual of placation. Their lot is "to dress themselves up every day and knock each other about and tie their bodies up in knots before an astounded congregation of country people."

It was as though they were lost in a land peopled by mastodons and rhinoceri. Whenever they met one of these monsters—which was on an average twice a day—their only means of escape was by charming it with their pipes, which never failed to render it harmless and satisfied. They then would hurry on, until they met another. . . .

The narrator meditates on the psychology of clowns while half-attending to the cheerless rigor with which they defy the tightfisted townspeople. On this occasion, however, the crowd will not be held quite at bay. The gloomy and meaningless performance, punctuated by displays of dignity ("A mournful, solemn and respectful, a *dead* silence would have been the ideal way, from his point of view, for the audience to have greeted his pathetic skill"), is suddenly truncated by a boy in the audience who begins jeering.

This boy had probably never thought comically before. Like corrosive lavas that illuminate before they destroy the object in their path, the torrent of his thoughts wrapt this dim and brutal figure. . . . The comedy of existence had burst in upon his active young brain without warning, and, in the form and nature of this awkward showman, was now raging within him like a heady wine. He had of a sudden opened his lips and begun

o

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covering this man with mockery. I was extremely moved and even awed at this sight.

The boy who began to think comically and the showman who would have preferred to be appreciated in respectful dead silence reappear five years later as Hamp and Arghol in *The Enemy of the Stars*, and fourteen years after that, repeatedly subdivided, as a whole cast of characters in *The Childermass*. They are, as we shall see, the two principles of action—he calls them Self and Not-self—whose quarrel in Lewis's mind guarantees the energy of his books and pictures.

As "The Pole" gave us the ex-nihil Lewis protagonist, so the irruption of the boy in "Les Saltimbanques" into a schematized performance gives us the elements of the Lewis plot. The generic theme of his novels is a battle of personalities which finally erupts from under and *truncates* a mechanical series of actions: Kreisler and Penhale hang themselves, Victor Stamp drops over a precipice, Snooty Baronet's alter ego is murdered in the Persian desert. Each has up to the moment of that consummation been engaged in the plot of a conventional novel of action (the circus) and simultaneously in a series of tensions whose logic, suddenly intersecting that of convention, precipitates him into "the universe of absence." For the logic of conventional plots unfolds in time, and we get a significant action when, through the agency of personality, Time is denied.

Something of the sort was in Lewis's mind in 1909 when he opened "Some Innkeepers and Bestre" with a protest against the conventional plots that make use of inns to set a flagging action going again "in a whirl of adventures of the high-road": a protest, that is, against *Tom Jones*, the

most mechanically plotted of English novels from initial intrigue to final marriage. The Lewis plot and the Lewis hero (this time Bestre the innkeeper) were both in his mind, if in corners of it not yet connected, when he wrote this sketch, but a difficulty which was to exercise his calamitously fecund ingenuity for many years is spotlighted by the fact that he began it with a reflective protest and not with Bestre himself. Bestre doesn't appear, in fact, for eight pages. The author's trouble seems to be that he can't make this primitive impostor interesting enough to sustain a significance which he feels transcends that of the "Pole" or the circus proprietor. In seeking to aggrandize trivial fact to the stature of a felt significance, he is competing with Bestre himself, whose gambit is to gaze at a new acquaintance "as though the latter, all unconscious, were entering a world full of astonishing things, of which he had not yet become aware. . . . At the passing of an enemy Bestre will pull up his blind with the defiant enthusiasm with which men raise aloft the standard of their country; one is meant to see, or rather hear, in his springy walk a chant of victory, in his immobility intimidation."

"He seems teaching you in his look the amazement you should feel"; one can imagine Ford's reminiscent amusement when a few hours after the encounter on the stairs he read in the manuscript that sentence and the rhetorical question that follows it:

Has Bestre discovered the only type of action compatible with artistic creation, assuring security and calm to him that holds the key of the situation, in a certain degree compelling others to accept your rules?

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Bestre, in fact, isn't quite the Lewis hero; he is the Lewis persona, particularly the persona of the late nineteen-twenties. Not only is his past obscure, but his presence intimidates. The presence of the hero is apt to be intimidating too, but that isn't the most important thing about him. The hero is preoccupied with himself, and when he does turn his attention upon the not-self, he deals with it by a rhetoric of action. Kreisler disrupts a social gathering which is jarring his introspections by catapulting his dancing-partner into its midst and interfering with the lie of another partner's bosom: "Excuse me! It's awkward—. More to the left—so! Clumsy things, and women are so proud of them! (No: I'm sure you're not!)" Bestre, on the contrary, disdains action; he attempts a rhetoric of simple existence. He is in fact what Lewis later called A Tyro, or Elemental Person.

These immense novices brandish their appetites in their faces, lay bare their teeth in a valedictory, inviting, or merely substantial laugh. . . . The action of a Tyro is necessarily very restricted, about that of a puppet worked with deft fingers, with a screaming voice underneath.

For this reason the Tyro is material not for narrative, but simply for the most vigorous possible presentation. "These partly religious explosions of laughing Elementals are at once satires, pictures and stories." They are ideal subjects for the later Lewis's static glittering prose, the waste products of which they absorb into their own system of energy. About 1921 Lewis drew pictures of a number of Tyros ("Most of them are, by the skill of the artist, seen basking in the sunshine of their own abominable nature"). Above

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their smug, flashing teeth, glint with misleading candor the same fierce staring eyes that distinguish most of Lewis's self-portraits.

The genus Tyro was later assimilated into the richer conception of The Enemy, Lewis's most famous persona. The second and last issue of *The Tyro* (1922) exhibits no more pictures of these engaging creatures. Instead there is a new incarnation of Bestre, now finally shaken to life by means of a prose which Lewis had spent thirteen years developing. What he developed it from was, surprisingly, a blend of Dickens and Chesterton, which reflects the vogue of 1909 in a way he couldn't help but subsequently disown, if only to gain leverage for wreaking his symbolic havoc on such plots as the opening paragraph gently deplores. The gambit with which the original version's second paragraph opens, in fact, is borrowed from the Chesterton of *The Defendant*—

. . . But I have entered my inns with none of these preoccupations; with the result that I have discovered that even the most visionary of customers—the Knight of La Mancha himself—could not be more so than many a provincial French innkeeper that I have met with. . . .

—and there is an especially diverting Dickensian page about a Paris furniture-mover, which disappeared altogether in the 1922 redaction of the story:

. . . Touched suddenly while engaged in carrying my things up one flight of stairs and down another, through Gothic portals one month, along airy galleries the next; past *concierges* whose "lodge" is always vacant, with a notice informing one that they are on the staircase, but whom one never sees—mysterious and *insaisissables concierges*!—past truculent *concierges* who placed a thousand

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obstacles in his way—who had insisted on seeing not only the receipt for the rent, but all the twenty-three different vouchers for his honesty that never leave a Frenchman's breast-pocket whether he be honest or not, and who, after prying lengthily into his life, allowed him in, still protesting; past drunken *concierges*, waking up and frenziedly attempting to do their duty, with an inarticulate and vehement cry and mad surging of the body and seething of the face, but relapsing into ignominious sleep; groping in shadowy vistas with my chest of drawers on his back, whose weight he knew to an ounce; pausing a moment on the edge of cloud-high balconies, from which the Panthéon could be seen, a flight of doves, the fresh world of the roofs—I would see his face grow pinched and strange all of a sudden. Or in some dark corner of the ascent, his forehead bent nearly to the floor, dripping with sweat, during the measured and excessive labor his mind exceptionally active, this thought would assail him. Or seeing the furniture settle down awkwardly, whimsically, forming sad lines and unhappy masses, in the new abode, every piece of it connected in the mind with some spacing or character of the last room, he would stand for a moment involuntarily discouraged and oppressed before its strangeness, and would regard this emotion as one inspired for me. Or the erratic life led by my furniture—its lack of harmony and cheerlessness in that particular moment, rather—suddenly revealed to him, by analogy, the way that he ought to regard its owner. And he saw dimly a spirit that, with its ideal surroundings, made no harmonious whole; something uprooted and forlorn. These feelings were a new bond between us, and of course the bill gave a generous leap at the same time, attaining an unprecedented figure.

A style as flexible, sensitive, and ebullient as that is good enough for a man of twenty-five to found a career on. Lewis began to write, with a considerable display of ease and talent, in a familiar English comic tradition; and if his Dickens is salted with Smollett, the taste remains familiar. It is not surprising that, having given away in

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this manner his possession of a relaxed comic gift, the man at war with the Past should have ducked into five years' silence, to emerge in 1914, the principles of a wholly new way with words securely in hand, between the calliope-pink covers of *BLAST*, the organ of Vorticism.

3. VORTICIST PROSE

IN 1914 HE SEEMS RESOLVED NEVER AGAIN TO WRITE A PHRASE that will betray a hint of literary antecedents; but that is only the most superficial of the ways in which his "Vorticist" prose abolished Time. It is in *Blast* that the Wyndham Lewis who appeared in silence on Ford's stairway finds an appropriate tongue. It is explosive in principle as well as in strategy; each sentence joins words by fiat, and the compound, though one cannot tell by what process it was arrived at, asserts as undeniably as a troop of Martians its right to corporate existence. It is, vastly elaborated, the style of its showpiece, the 1928 *Childermass*, and its mechanisms underlie the wonderfully expressive prose of Lewis's masterpiece, the 1937 *Revenge for Love*. We can observe it, not quite coming off, in the *Blast* account of a thunderclap:

The great beer-coloured sky, at the fuss, loapt in a fête of green gaiety.

Its immense lines bent like whalebones and sprang back with slight deaf thunder.

The sky, two clouds, their furious shadows, fought.

The bleak misty hospital of the horizon grew pale with fluid of anger.

The trees were wiped out in a blow.

THE WAR WITH TIME

Thunderstorms happen in time and manifest duration; it is the necessity for placing things in succession, admitting sequence between paragraphs where the instinct at work within sentences is to abolish it, that makes this passage sound labored. Where nothing is happening, however, the effect is memorable. Here are the stars:

The stars shone madly in the archaic blank wilderness of the universe, machines of prey.

Mastodons, placid in electric atmosphere, white rivers of power. They stood in eternal black sunlight. . . .

Throats iron eternities, drinking heavy radiance, limbs towers of blatant light, the stars poised, immensely distant, with their metal sides, pantheistic machines.

It is a style composed of phrases, not actions. The verb, inexorably the *time*-word, is where possible reduced to impotence ("shone" and "stood") or else simply omitted. Of course, there is no reason why there should not be more such phrases about the stars, or for that matter why a few of them should not be omitted, except that they seem, once achieved, too good to scrap. Sporadically conscious though he was of the necessity, Lewis didn't succeed in making his new prose *move* rather than accumulate, until, in the 1930's, he had struck his truce with Time.

He had only to abandon the posterish conventions of *Blast*, however, to possess a method for titling a book unforgettably or presenting any baroque stasis, whether of persons or places, with unflagging vigor. Its mechanisms can fix on paper with impartial efficiency New York sunbathers, "a collection of shabby baskers saluting the sun with many a caustic blink, the wreckage of Anglo-Saxon machine-mindedness"; the British grin, "conven-

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tionalizing like gunshot, freezing supple Real in ferocious chemistry of Laughter"; or Gertrude Stein, "Teutonic music, *jazzed*—the German musical soul leering at itself in a mirror, and sticking out at itself a stuttering welt of swollen tongue." At greater length, here is the texture of a fake Van Gogh—

. . . Gnarled figures of peasants, with the striations of tree trunks, gathered in the foreground like hoboes in a hailstorm. But this hailstorm was the sunset. And the hailstones were the opaque particles showering down from the conflagration of the romantic solar disk, about to set, like a bloated firework.

And here is Ford himself—

Hueffer was a flabby lemon and pink giant, who hung his mouth open as though he were an animal at the Zoo inviting buns—especially when ladies were present. Over the gaping mouth damply depended the ragged ends of a pale lemon moustache. This ex-collaborator with Joseph Conrad was himself, it always occurred to me, a typical figure out of a Conrad book—a caterer, or corn-factor, coming on board—blowing like a porpoise with the exertion—at some Eastern port. . . .

This account of Ford was written in 1949. It is only a slightly more hurried application of the devices by which the stars and trees in *Blast*, or the characters of *Tarr*, were rendered thirty-five years earlier.

If anything extended could be done with it, this early style would be one of the most impressive inventions in the history of English literature. It remains one of the most fascinating. It may owe its origin in part to the impact on Lewis's sensibility of the compound nouns and participialized verbs peculiar to the German prose in which he has steeped himself: terms like *Blutsgefühl*,

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Geldmensch, *Judenfrage*, and *Leihkapital* merge with interesting casualness into the prose texture of his hastily written 1931 book on Hitler. The essential trick is worth isolating in a sentence of which the elements are conventional and only their mode of combination novel:

Henry James: Ghost psychology of New England old maid: stately maze of imperturbable analogics.

Every word attaches itself to Henry James; but it was Lewis who attached them alchemically to one another. It isn't the maze that is stately, nor the analogies that are imperturbable; but by unhooking each of these words from its appointed object and joining them instead to each other, Lewis, in setting his signature on the combination, releases magnetisms that make its elements seem, once so joined, inseparable. The phrases thus arrived at are so condensed that their rightness grows wonderfully persuasive. Assonance and rhythm—not meaning—cause this particular ordering of the terms to snap together like a clock spring; any other arrangement, once we have seen this one, would hang open in flaccid incompetence. In this universe of words—precisely the “finely sculptured surface of sheer words” Lewis much later suggested discriminating readers should hunger for—we soon stop worrying about mere reality. It is a sort of dream-literature of unexampled energy.

4. THE ENEMY OF THE STARS

BESIDES THE VORTICIST PROSE, AND THE POSTER-LIKE BLASTS and Blesses that display its staccato mannerisms in inch-

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6

BLAST

years **1837** to **1900**

Curse abysmal inexcusable middle-class
(also Aristocracy and Proletariat).

BLAST

pasty shadow cast by gigantic **Boehm**

(imagined at introduction of **BOURGEOIS VICTORIAN**
VISTAS).

WRING THE NECK OF all sick inventions born in
that progressive white wake.

BLAST

their weeping whiskers—hirsute

RHETORIC of **EUNUCH** and **STYLIST**—

SENTIMENTAL HYGIENICS

ROUSSEAUISMS (wild Nature cranks)

FRATERNIZING WITH MONKEYS

DIABOLICS

—raptures and roses
of the erotic bookshelves
culminating in

PURGATORY OF
PUTNEY.

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CHAOS OF ENOCH ARDENS

laughing Jennys
Ladies with Pains
good-for-nothing Guineveras.

SNOBbish BORROVIAN running after GIPSY KINGS and ESPADAS

bowing the knee to
wild Mother Nature,
her feminine contours,
Unimaginative insult to
MAN.

DAMN

all those to-day who have taken on that Rotten Menagerie,
and still crack their whips and tumble in Piccadilly Circus,
as though London were a provincial town.

**WE WHISPER IN YOUR EAR A GREAT
SECRET.**

**LONDON IS NOT A PROVINCIAL
TOWN.**

We will allow Wonder Zoos. But we do not want the
GLOOMY VICTORIAN CIRCUS in
Piccadilly Circus.

IT IS PICCADILLY'S CIRCUS !

—from *Blast* No. 1

high letters on a 9 x 12 page, *Blast* No. 1 contains *The Enemy of the Stars* and a sequence of art manifestoes. The arguments of these obey the same impulse as the language does: the principle is that Lewis's words emanate very decidedly from *him*. His nature exacts, as he put it a year later, "instinctive organizations by the living will within," rather than "dead arrangements by the tasteful hand without." His characteristic syntax is synthetic, seldom "natural"; it serves to splice phrases together. Nor do the phrases arise "naturally" from the subject: they must ascribe their origin to the vigorous intervention of the writer's will. The artist doesn't see and record, he registers phenomena and reconstitutes them with images. "The first reason for not imitating Nature is that you cannot convey the emotion you receive at the contact of Nature by imitating her, but only by becoming her." The cat in *The Apes of God* "like a beadle goose-stepped with eerie convulsions out of the night cast by a cluster of statuary." The ass in *The Childermass* "pumps an ear-splitting complaint into its downy snout, scouring the loud sound up and down in an insane see-saw." The Vorticist prose is a brilliant and fascinating epitome of Locke's dream and Nietzsche's complementary doctrine. "If the material world were not empirical and matter simply for science, but were organized as in the imagination, we should live as though we were dreaming. Art's business is to show how, then, life would be." The world is dead, or at least inaccessible, and we are locked up inside our own skulls; so out of profound irritation with the random triviality of the given, the creative intelligence—such is its nature—forges for itself new environments. "Reality," he wrote in

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1914, "is in the artist; the image only, and not the reality, is to be found in life." In 1917 he enjoined the man of genius, "Yourself must be your caste."

The man of genius has a Self which is very nearly a force of Nature. It inhabits a "bacillus-ridden, terribly exposed *pied-à-terre*," but it enjoys "a perpetually renewed power of DOING WHAT NATURE DOES, only doing it with all the beauty of accident, without the certain futility that accident implies." Most artists (and most people) can't accomplish "the beauty of accident," and work like machines. That is why they form "schools." They counterfeit the man of genius from beneath an indurated carapace of mannerisms, by means of a ritual of mechanized gestures which pass for creativity and are really only the cycling motions of manufacture. Or they counterfeit Nature, which amounts to the same thing, their constructions in words or pigment having for the critical intellect the status of meticulous paper flowers. They make a great deal of money, naturally. Meanwhile, the man of genius is "entering the forms of the mighty phenomena around us, and seeing how near [he] can get to being a river or a star, without actually *becoming* that . . . without the sudden extinction and neutralization that awaits you as matter, or as the machine." This is the theme of *The Enemy of the Stars*.

The scene of this dream-play ("very well acted by you and me") is nowhere, nowhen: "Some bleak circus, uncovered, carefully chosen, vivid night. It is packed with Posterity, silent and expectant." This is the ring of the Breton saltimbanques, transformed into a scene into which the audience looks down "as though it were a hut rolled

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half on its back, door upwards, characters giddily mounting in its opening." Here, before the eyes of Posterity, the Lewis hero ("me") does battle with "you." The hero, on this his first extended appearance, is named Arghol. "Each force attempts to shake him. . . . He lies like human strata of infernal biologies. Walks like wary shifting of bodies in distant equipoise. Sits like a god built by an architectural stream, fecunded by mad blasts of sunlight."

They strain to see him, a gladiator who has come to fight a ghost, Humanity—the great Sport of Future Mankind.

He is the prime athlete exponent of this sport in its palmy days. Posterity slowly sinks into the hypnotic trance of Art, and the Arena is transformed into the necessary scene.

The red walls of the Universe now shut them in, with this condemned protagonist.

They breathe in close atmosphere of terror and necessity till the execution is over, the red walls recede, the universe satisfied.

In a performance like that of the Breton circus proprietor, Arghol undergoes with dignity an anonymous beating to which he disdains not to submit himself; then "imprisoned in a messed socket of existence," he defies the Stars, "cliff of cadaverous beaming force," his candle against their cosmos. At this moment the heckling boy of "Les Saltimbanques" makes his appearance under the name of Hanp.

Hanp is Lewis's Ubu Roi. If Arghol is the lonely hero ("Blows rain on me. Mine is not a popular post. It is my destiny, right enough, an extremely unpleasant one"), Hanp, who emerges "coughing like a goat, rolling a cigarette," is sensual man, "strong and insolent with con-

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sciousness, stuffed in him in anonymous form of vastness of Humanity: full of rage at gigantic insolence and superiority, combined with utter uncleanness and despicableness—all back to physical parallel—of his Master.” His grudge against Arghol is that Arghol doesn’t merge into his crowd-life:

Between Personality and Mankind it is always a question of dog and cat; they are diametrically opposed species. Self is the ancient race, the rest are the new ones. Self is the race that lost. But Mankind still suspects Egoistic plots, and hunts Pretenders.

Arghol’s grudge against Hanp is that, being in a sense Arghol’s creation, he is Arghol’s Ape:

I find I wanted to make a naïf yapping Poodle-parasite of you.—I shall always be a prostitute.

I wanted to make you myself; you understand?

Every man who wants to make another HIMSELF, is seeking a companion for his detached ailment of a self.

You are an unclean little beast, crept gloomily out of my ego. You are the world, brother, with its family objections to me.

“You have crept gloomily out of my ego”: that is the key to much of Lewis’s subsequent career. Hanp, insofar as he is real for Arghol, has been created by him. It was impossible for Arghol not to create him; like the double star Algol (*Alpha Perset*) after which he is named, Arghol must—as the very condition of his existence—waltz eternally about a common center of gravity with this unluminous companion, which eclipses his light with clockwork periodicity and transforms the effulgence of genius into a recurrent demoniacal wink. Hanp is more

intimate than "other people"; Hanp is the social Self inseparable from the pure intelligence. Elsewhere Arghol says,

Men have a loathsome deformity called Self; affliction got through indiscriminate rubbing against their fellows: Social excrescence.

Their being is regulated by exigencies of this affliction. Only one operation can cure it: the suicide's knife.

Hence the War with Time: "The process and condition of life, without any exception, is a grotesque degradation and 'souillure' of the original solitude of the soul. There is no help for it, since each gesture and word partakes of it, and the child has already covered himself with mire." It is intrinsic to the dialectical purity of the world of Hanp and Arghol that nothing can happen but the initial and ultimate acts of violence: the beating of Arghol, then talk, then the double death. Hanp stabs the sleeping Arghol and then jumps into the canal. The Vorticist metaphysic of character implies, as we shall see, a metaphysic of violence; ordinary actions are but as pulse beats and breathings; only the most cataclysmic events can be said to *happen*.

In *The Lion and the Fox*, a work of nonfiction in which the Arghol figure has read Machiavelli, manufactures colossi, and is named Shakespeare, Lewis puts it in this way: the tragedy of Shakespeare's tremendous heroes ("the world's adversary and opposite") is "that they are involved in a *real* action: whereas they come from, and naturally inhabit, an ideal world." It is the process of "souillure," inseparable from human contact, that destroys them at last. The boy always breaks in upon the lonely ritual of the saltimbanques, "for in the pessimism of

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tragedy not only have the great always to be vanquished; but they have always to be overcome by trivial opponents who substitute a poor and vulgar thing for the great and whole thing that they have destroyed." The hero is caught in two worlds, that of ideal austerity and that of Time's sequential mechanisms; and it is a denizen of the time-world who strikes him down. Iago epitomizes "the dark equivocal crowd saturated with falsity." It is no wonder that Lewis was for a long time interested in the author of *Timon of Athens*, *Coriolanus*, and the Sonnets against Time.

Shakespeare, however, really presents too bland a personality to enchant the creator of Arghol, so *The Lion and the Fox* makes him over in the image of George Chapman, whom Lewis (in Part VIII) finds intensely interesting. Chapman's Duke of Byron is Arghol's only direct ancestor; Lewis's romantic rant, completely untouched either by the nineteenth-century Gothicism that makes *Childe Harold* sound stagey or by the interest in human complexities that makes Shakespeare so elusive, resounds dully with the four-square end-stopped nihilism of a Senecan hero considering "great Necessity." Yet all his contempt for "exemplary and formal sheep" cannot prevent the Duke from declaiming, or Lewis from quoting,

We must reform and have a new creation
Of state and government, and on our Chaos
Will I sit brooding up another world.

For the artist is a hero who, caught in the time-world, projects visions of a world tolerable *for him*. His visions don't assist him in the time-world, of course: "A scornful

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optimism, with its confident onslaughts on our snobbism, will not make material existence a peer for our energy. The gladiator is not a perpetual monument of triumphant health: Napoleon was harried with Elbas: moments of vision are blurred rapidly, and the poet sinks into the rhetoric of the will." But Art has nothing to do with the welter of "Life":

. . . perfection is not in the waves or houses that the poet sees. To rationalise that appearance is not possible. Beauty is an icy douche of ease and happiness at something *suggesting* perfect conditions for an organism: it remains suggestion. A stormy landscape, and a pigment consisting of a lake of hard, yet florid waves; delight in each brilliant scoop or ragged burst, was John Constable's beauty. Leonardo's consisted in a red rain on the shadowed side of heads, and heads of massive female aesthetes. Uccello accumulated pale parallels, and delighted in cold architecture of distinct colour. Korin found in the symmetrical gushing of water, in waves like huge vegetable insects, traced and worked faintly, on a golden p $\hat{a}$ to, his business. Cézanne liked cumbrous, democratic slabs of life, slightly leaning, transfixed in vegetable intensity.

Beauty is an immense predilection, a perfect conviction of the desirability of a certain thing, whatever that thing may be. It is a universe for one organism. . . .

That is a formulation of 1917 ("Inferior Religions"), as slightly retouched ten years later. It indicates the one sort of reality which, in Lewis's view, the artist can meaningfully pursue: a coherent organization of selected and compatible sensations, often emblematic in their grouping. Apart from the muscular and intimidating dream landscapes of *The Enemy of the Stars* and *The Childermass*, it appears in his writing only in flashes; but the wedges, ovoids, and perpendiculars of his own "immense pre-

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dilection" are the vocabulary of most of his painting. The fiction, on the other hand, is compromised from the start by the presence of human beings and the need for a human viewpoint. The Self, Arghol said, is a "loathsome deformity," contracted from other beings like a disease and curable only by the knife. The artist, however, must live, so he must strike some sort of truce with this self; and he must live among Hanps, so he must come to a working arrangement with them. These are emotional arrangements, and Lewis's fictions project his long sequence of attempts to stabilize them. The interest of this drama is intense, though that of the individual works varies. The verbal cataracts of *Blast* often pour over worn configurations of feeling, naively limited in contrast with the "Russian" complexities of *Tarr* (also written in 1914) or the grim comic vision of the *Little Review* pieces of 1917—"The Code of a Herdsman," "Cantelman's Spring-Mate," and "Inferior Religions"—which, as they manage a complex balance of feelings to which the style is kept subservient, are the best work of Lewis's early period. These works have no successors, however, until 1937, because instead of consolidating their gains, Lewis diverted his richest energies for twenty years into polemic, while his fiction, making contact with the art manifestoes rather than with the art, dealt with the mechanisms that interfere with the realization of Lewisian visions in any medium but paint.

PART II TARR AND CANTELMAN

I'm sorry if I've been too brutal girls!
—*One-Way Song*

1. ARGHOL INTO TARR

NEITHER WYNDHAM LEWIS THE HUMAN BEING NOR LEWIS the creative personality can be reduced to the elements discernible in Arghol or the figure on the stairs. The outlines of the force that is shaping these figures are neither so harsh nor so constricted as the figures themselves. As Lewis has written of certain drawings of the same period,

The way these things were done . . . is that a mental-emotive impulse—and by this is meant subjective intellection, like magic or religion—is let loose upon a lot of blocks and lines of various dimensions, and encouraged to push them round and to arrange them at will. It is of course not an accidental, isolated mood: but it is recurrent groups of emotions and coagulations of thinking that are involved.

Blocks and lines, being less human than words, will, when shaped by a comparable impulse, yield a less turgid, more austere result. The violence of the "Timon" and "Planners" series of paintings is cool and meticulous. So

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is the invective of the Blasts and Blesses, in which inflammatory words are treated as visual objects, their energy enclosed by the typographic conventions that govern their disposition on the page. Lewis's most energetic and crowded compositions are never palpitant with the romance of heady movement. Their frenzy remains frozen, under glass. Even the astonishing "Timon" design, whose posturing courtiers and men-at-arms inhabit with precarious insouciance a continuous explosion of blocks, clouds, and jagged lightning, depicts its hundreds of conflicting elements in the grimace of action, not its heat. The meaning of Vorticism as a name for a philosophy of art is that a still point controls the circling flotsam of demotic living, which in fact circles most wildly in closest proximity to the funnel of calm. In that still space, out of time, the Vorticist "rides in the whirlwind and directs the storm," converting it as he does so into a *stage* storm (the separation between Art and Life is absolute) with the air of a Creator who has many other effects up his sleeve.

What is startling about these pictures, and would be startling about *The Enemy of the Stars* if it came off better, is the paradoxical absence of personality. It is not merely that human forms are largely eschewed or that Lewis does not traffic in the cubist apples and mandolins; the selecting and arranging force itself seems inhuman, precisely "a mental-emotive impulse," not a man. A force of nature, we are meant to suppose, has been at work here; no human predilections are mirrored. Selfhood, Arghol's disease, has been suppressed, and the brush left under the control of some principle of energy inhabiting the primitive solitude of the soul.

But the artist's Self, in these disturbing works, is always just out of range, accumulating and brooding upon its social and personal problems. It demands, we come to feel, visualization in human terms, with as little "souillure" as possible. So we need not be surprised that the novel *Tarr*, written late in 1914, shortly after the composition of the first *Blast* material, opens on much richer areas of feeling.

This virtue is perhaps a little unintentional. The first page of *Tarr*—an impression of Paris—might have been a stage direction for *The Enemy of the Stars*, and the discussions conducted by Tarr himself in the "Overture" read like *Blast* manifestoes dramatized. Frederick Tarr (in certain obvious ways a self-portrait) is a more whimsical, less stormy Arghol. He harangues his lay interlocutor Hobson in the Arghol-role of the One confronting the Many:

But Hobson, he considered, was a crowd.=You could not say he was an individual.=He was a set. He sat there, a cultivated audience.=He had the aplomb and absence of self-consciousness of numbers—of those who know they are not alone.=Tarr was shy and the reverse by turns. He was alone. . . .

Tarr gazed on this impersonality, of crowd origin, with autocratic scorn.¹

The Cambridge product Hobson ("He had nothing to distract him from the very satisfactory, if tame, advantages of his education. His training was a toy he never tired

¹ All quotations are from the first edition (1918), not the revised one of ten years later. The idiosyncratic punctuation is yet another device for preventing the prose from *flowing*. The revised version is more conventional in this as in most other respects.

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of.") is simply a Hanp who has gotten cultivated beyond the point of insolent rage. He isn't a creation of Tarr's, but Tarr uses him as if he were:

"A man only goes and confesses his faults to the world when his self will not acknowledge or listen to them. The function of a friend is to be a substitute for this defective self, to be the World and the Real without the disastrous consequences of reality.=Yet punishment is one of his chief offices. . . ."

This was written in Tarr's diary. He was now chastising this self he wrote of for not listening, by telling the first stranger met.

What Tarr is explaining is "why I am associated publicly with this pumpkin," his "official fiancée," Fräulein Bertha Lunken. The gist of his explanation is that in gathering his creative powers for Art, the artist discards Life to shift for itself.

With most people, not describable as artists, all the finer part of their vitality goes into sex. They become third-rate poets during their courtship. . . . The artist is he in whom this emotionality normally absorbed by sex is so strong that it claims a newer and more exclusive field of deployment.=Its first creation is the *Artist* himself, a new sort of person; the creative man.

Tarr has created himself, with considerable severity. The character of his work, like Lewis's, "is ascetic rather than sensuous, and divorced from immediate life. There is no slop of sex in *that*." Hence,

All the delicate psychology another man naturally seeks in a woman, the curiosity of form, windows on other lives, love and passion, I seek in my work and not elsewhere.

As for loving, his phallus will do that for him. Fräulein Lunken answers merely to "a slovenly, common portion

of my life that has been isolated and repudiated by the energies I am so proud of."

Though we gather a few hints about Tarr's past, he is essentially the Lewisian Man from Nowhere; "he impressed you as having inherited himself last week, and as under a great press of business to grasp the details and resources of the concern." Immediately behind this pristine apparition we are meant to discern the creative act by which he erected his energetic Selfhood out of the welter of Life, the claims of which are henceforth irrelevant.

So are the claims of the usual novelist's canons, which posit a narrator "not acting as *oneself*, but tacitly impersonating someone altogether less extraordinary than a poet, a painter, a philosopher, etc. etc." Lewis recalls having had in mind "a public d'élite who could be addressed in blank verse. . . . In writing *Tarr* I wanted at the same time for it to be a novel, and to do a piece of writing worthy of the hand of the abstractist innovator (which was an impossible combination). Anyhow it was my object to eliminate anything less essential than a noun or a verb. Prepositions, pronouns, articles—the small fry—as far as might be, I would abolish." Hence the jagged prose of the first forty or fifty pages.

This part of the book simply transposes portions of *Blast* into a more genial idiom. Tarr and Hobson (and Hobson's successors in subsequent chapters, Butcher and Lowndes) are Arghol and Hanp disguised as human beings. The disguise began to preoccupy the author, however. "I grew more and more interested with every page in the life of my characters," he recalled thirty-five years

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later, recalling also what must have been the irritating discovery that "words and syntax were not susceptible of transformation into abstract terms." The net result of this compromised austerity is that Tarr's huge foil, Otto Kreisler, rivets our attention from the moment he is introduced on page 67, "shaving himself, one eye fixed on Paris." Perhaps because he represents "Life" in the dualism of the book, whereas Tarr, confined to "Art," can be no more than a walking idea, Kreisler accumulates "presence" to an overwhelming degree. This disagreeable Teuton, charged with lethal romance, absorbs most of the energies of the novel into his prolonged clockwork suicide, so bringing "life" to what is, according to Lewis/Tarr, the only significant denouement it can aspire to. Tarr pontificates:

Death is the one attribute that is peculiar to *life*. It is the something that it is impossible to imagine in connection with art.= Reality is entirely founded on this fact, that of *Death*. All *action* revolves around that, and has it for motif. . . .

The conversations about Art and Death in the last part of the book, balancing those about Sex and Life in the first, frame with hallucinatory brilliance Kreisler's long, ponderous quest of annihilation.

2. KREISLER, "LIFE," AND THE "MEDIUM"

KREISLER MOVES THROUGH HIS LAST DAYS WITH THE STEALTHY tread of an automaton, watching clocks and listening for bells, convinced that he is a pawn in the grip of Fate. His creditors give him no peace; he attributes this to

conspiracy. The friend on whom he is accustomed to sponge has been usurped by a Pole named Soltyk. The fiancée who gave him the brushes with which he daily grooms his moustache has since married his father; the allowance on which he lives in a cluttered room like a burial-vault comes only when written for and always tardily. "On two occasions forty marks and thirty marks had been deducted respectively, merely as an irritative measure, no reason given in the letter. Otto on his side made no remark. The father was jealous, contemptuous and sulky. Otto the same, if you substitute vaguely 'goguenard' for 'jealous.'" What has driven his father to this waspish displeasure is Kreisler's contempt for a sane career. Though he does little painting, he clings to the idea of Art.

Actually, of course, he belongs not to the world of Lewisian Art but to that of sensation; hence the fatal impact on his sensibility of the sinuous baroque Anastasya, "bespangled and accoutred like a Princess of the household of Peter the Great, jangling and rumbling like a savage showman through abashed capitals." In the days after their chance encounter in a restaurant, he becomes as obsessed by her vitality as Tarr is by his own creative personality. He is Tarr's antithesis, we are carefully told: "When the events of his life became too unwieldy or overwhelming, he converted them into love, as he might have done, with specialized talent, into some art or other." He is totally unaware of his various paramours as persons; a certain mechanical brutality animates his endemic "maze of shallow dreams." Having exhausted a relationship, he is accustomed to sever it violently—"usually on some indi-

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gestible epigram, that worried the poor girl for the rest of her days."

By now, however, Fate is closing in; when we first encounter Kreisler he is obsessed by the impossibility of getting out of pawn the dress suit he feels he must have for the party at which, he has convinced himself, he must appear in order to make an impression on Anastasya. The situation—love, and no money—is conventional enough; but by presenting the subjective and the objective alike as merging features in one dense dreamlike medium, Lewis converts his narrative into an essay in compulsive hysteria midway between comedy and tragedy but drawing on the energies of both. Kreisler, Kreisler's world, and Kreisler's behavior are bound into one organism by a rich brutal prose which at its best neither disappears like glass nor coalesces like an ornamented husk. Kreisler isn't so much a "character" as a sort of eyeless misshapen fish, at home in the prose and moving murkily through it. The heightened reality of a continuous hallucination surrounds his progress to the pawnshop, to the ball, to the flat of Tarr's fiancée, to the dueling ground. The effect—character, theme, and treatment together—constitutes an artistic invention, something valuable and unprecedented in fiction.

It is a little misleading to talk about technique; like all Lewis's successes the Kreisler section of *Tarr* has a fortuitous air, though like his masterpiece *The Revenge for Love*—a sustained anomaly—it implies a weighty rather than a trivial fortuity. Though the whole is almost continually impressive, details look clumsy in quotation, and pages or paragraphs slipshod or repetitious. An occasional sen-

tence can be found that will illustrate the nervous force of the whole:

The letter had been laid on the table, by the side of which stood the large gas-stove, like a safe, its gas stars, on top, blasting away luridly at pans and saucepans with Bertha's breakfast.

"Blasting" crystallizes the whole observation, somewhere between the auditory and the kinesthetic: Bertha's stove, its essential gesture captured, is present on the page as is no other kitchen appliance in English fiction. To this order of irrelevance Lewis's detailed triumphs are apt to belong; there would be more point in infusing with reality Bertha herself, or the letter, yet both remain simply nouns. The perfunctory texture of the sentences immediately preceding is more typical:

Bertha was in her little kitchen. It was near the front door. Next to it was her studio or *salon*, then bedroom: along a passage at right angles the rooms rented by Clara Goenthner, her friend.

The layout of her flat isn't of the smallest significance to the narrative; and the fact that it isn't presented as if it were gives point to the question why it is presented at all. Yet the secret of much of the gripping reality of *Tarr* seems to lie in the artless interpolation of humdrum sentences like these, with their hypnotic mechanical claim on the attention, stirred by occasional quiverings of power like the sentence about the stove. This curious principle can be further investigated with the aid of the revised version (1928, reprinted 1952), from which, in the process of firming up the narrative, Lewis has inadvertently wafted much of the magic away. Not content with correcting a number of outright and annoying ambiguities, he has fussed in

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almost every sentence with locutions which, however reprehensible in detail, signify less when brushed off for the market than when streaked with the loam of the unconscious from which they were so hastily gathered. Here is Bertha considering in her normal dazed manner Kreisler's recent assault:

At a leap he was in the rigid foreground of her life. He had absorbed all the rest in an immense clashing wink. But the moment following this "desperateness," he stood, abstracted, distant and baffling as before. It was difficult to realize he was there.

A startling metaphor causes Kreisler to leap forward for an instant out of the rapid hazy writing. In the revision, by all textbook standards more precise, the "wink" is surrounded by too much irrelevant exactness of trope to clash properly:

At a leap he was in the rigid foreground of her life: in an immense clashing wink he had drawn attention to himself, but for such a comparatively short time, and the next moment there he had stood, abstracted and baffling as before: once more it was difficult to realize he was there, he was the machine again, a boneheaded nobody.

Against the accomplished analytic expansiveness of the final version must be counted a real loss of kinetic power. At its best the prose of the original *Tarr* has a sensuous primitive energy which rides over missing connectives and unrealized images: indeed runs the better for being undistracted by a paved road's clatter. The thick medium in which the characters move grows out of the very irrelevance of sharply noted detail and permeates the book from end to end. This luck stays with the writer even when he is rendering the medium directly:

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Tarr felt the street was a pleasant current, setting from some immense, and tropic gulf, neighboured by Floridas of remote invasions. He ambled down it puissantly, shoulders shaped like these waves; a heavy-sided drunken fish. The houses, with winks of shocked clock-work, were grazed, holding along their surface thick soft warmth. It poured weakly into his veins. . . . Tarr stopped at a dairy. He bought saladed potatoes, a 'Petit suisse.' The coolness, as he entered, felt eerie. . . .

Tarr's euphoria and the clammy psychic atmosphere of Kreisler's romantic nihilism are more closely akin than Lewis perhaps intended. This showpiece of Vorticist prose gets its unexpectedly sensuous effects by the same irrational casualness ("Floridas of remote invasions"; "The houses, with winks of shocked clock-work, were grazed") as the less energized staple writing of the novel. We seem indebted to a liaison between the author's self-consciousness and his oddly compulsive dealings with language for benefits beyond the reach of art. Probably the sentence about the houses was meant to convey a sharp visual impression; they were grazed with light, and the highlights winked and shifted mechanically to the pace of the moving observer's step. But condensed as it is, it becomes a puzzle, and by page 36 one has stopped pausing over such knots; so the words, failing to slip into each other's company smoothly, become atoms of dreamlike verbal sensation. Once more it is difficult to assign the proportions of technique and chance in the decidedly vivid effect.

Kreisler's conviction that he is a puppet of Fate, however, blends admirably into haphazardly sculptured writing of this kind. There is nothing better in the novel than the chapter in which he behaves with trancelike boorishness at the dance for which he has not succeeded in lib-

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erating his dress suit. He has made the Lewis entrance out of nowhere, a total stranger and the only man present not in evening dress. The pawnshop in the rue de Rennes is one of Fate's instruments with the enigmas of which he delights to bludgeon those who float insipidly outside of Fate's vortex. He stops just short of full communication, however, to preserve his private world inviolate.

With smiling German ceremoniousness, with ingenious circumlocutions, he bent down to her nervously smiling face and poured into her startled ear symbols and images of pawn-shops, usury, three gold balls, 'pious mountains,' 'smokkin' or 'Frac' suits, etc., which he seemed a little to confuse, overwhelmed her with a serious terminology, all in a dialect calculated to baffle the most acute philologist.

"Yes, it *is* interesting," she said with strained conviction.

"Isn't it?" Kreisler replied.—It was a comparative estimate of the facilities for the disposing of a watch in Germany and France. . . .

His hostess palms him off in despair on a Mrs. Bevelage; but Kreisler has seen through this maneuver, and "looking with ostentatious regret at a long-legged flapper seated next door, cast a reproachful glance at his hostess."

Left alone with the widow, he surveyed her ample and worldly form.

"Get thee to a nunnery!" he said dejectedly.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Yes.—You have omitted 'My Lord.'"

Mrs. Bevelage looked pleased and puzzled. Possibly he was a Count or Baron.

"Do you know that stingy but magnificent edifice—"

"Yes—?"

"That handsome home of precarious 'Fracs' in the Rue de Rennes—?"

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"I'm afraid I don't understand—." "The widow had not got used to his composite tongue. She liked Kreisler, however.

"Shall we dance?" he said, getting up quickly.

He clasped her firmly in the small of the back, and they got ponderously in motion, he stamping a little bit, as though he mistook the waltz for a more primitive music.

He whirls her after a few minutes into the midst of a "large featureless human group" near the front door, and after more talk about pawnshops departs, pleased with his work, to find another victim.

His humor, however, is soon converted into studied outrage; the catalyst for this is the sight of Anastasya in the company of Soltyk, the Pole who has recently appropriated a friend on whom Kreisler used to depend for money. Soltyk he comes to mark down as the ubiquitous tool of Fate, always coming between him and his desires. He is commencing to itch for action; and action, because it is the stuff of Life, is polarized toward Death. For the remainder of the party he boils up in drunken boorishness; but this is only a phase in the larger rhythm by which he will soon coerce the incredulous Soltyk into a duel.

All Lewis characters have opposite numbers. Soltyk is to Kreisler as Hobson is to Tarr. Tarr closed his café lecture with a ritual assault on the crowd-man Hobson, who dresses like an artist but out of whose head "no thought can come before it has slipped on its uniform." Hobson, "systematizing and vulgarizing the individual," reminds Tarr of the obsequious vagabond who got a beating from Baudelaire instead of alms.

The beggar then, when he is almost beaten to a pulp, suddenly straightens out beneath the blows; *expands, stretches*; his eyes dart

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fire! He rises and falls on the poet tooth and nail. In a few seconds he has laid him out flat, and is just going to finish him off, when an 'agent' arrives.—The poet is enchanted. He has accomplished something!

But Hobson is "meaner spirited than the most abject tramp"; so Tarr, in mock despair at the prospect of accomplishing anything with such a cabbage, knocks off his hat instead. It is the creative impulse in Tarr that Hobson frustrates. Analogously, Kreisler's apocalyptic lust for action is thwarted by Soltyk's ordinariness. Patiently smacking Soltyk's face in the Café Souchet to arouse a decent fire in this doughlike antagonist, he presents the Kreislerian counterpart to the episode of Hobson's hat.

Soltyk is enough like him to arouse his lust for self-destruction; "Kreisler and he disliked each other for obscure physiological reasons: they had perhaps scrapped in the dressing-rooms of Creation for some particular fleshly covering, and each secured only fragments of a coveted garment. In some ways, then, Soltyk was his efficient and more accomplished counterpart, although as empty and unsatisfactory as himself." Lewis's minds abounds in hierarchies of the unreal. Arghol is the Enemy of the Stars, and his creature, Hanp, the enemy of Arghol. This pattern recurs all the way to the bottom; certain Hanps are Nietzschean supermen,² pseudo-Arghols, as Kreisler is a

² It should be emphasized that Arghol doesn't come out of Nietzsche, whom Lewis accuses of popularizing the Arghol austerity and "making an Over-man out of every vulgarly energetic grocer in Europe." The superman is merely an accelerated Hanp. "The superman is the child with rather more daring than the other children, who wants all the things that the other children want, but who has enough cunning to see through the fraud in time, and determines, by breaking the rules of the game on the one hand, and by

pseudo-Tarr. They imagine that they are at war with creation. Thus Kreisler defies Fate, and simultaneously defies his own image, Solytk.

The morning after the ball, Kreisler launches himself decisively toward death. To an ultimatum from his father he replies that his body will return to Germany but not he. "If—keeping to your decision—no money is sent, it being impossible to live without money, I shall on the seventh of July, this day next month, shoot myself." He then proceeds to seduce Tarr's fiancée, who has been so incautious as to show him sympathy and sit for him as a model ("Your arms are like bananas!" is his unexpected way of transforming their relationship from the professional to the personal). Bertha is fated to be the eternal receptacle for baffled passions. As for Tarr she had been a *pis aller* for the impulses that were not wholly gathered into Art, so for Kreisler she is a despised surrogate for the ebullient Anastasya and the claims of Life. Having satisfied his need for a sexual victim, Kreisler arranges to feel himself insulted by Solytk, methodically forces him into accepting a challenge which the astonished Pole refuses to the last to take seriously, and places himself in the hands of his "deputy fate," an alarming Russian with a professional appetite for duels who manages his client's last hours with gusto, not omitting to provide a huge alarm clock to prevent his oversleeping on the fateful morning.

The duel, like everything else, is a fiasco. Kreisler clowns and grimaces until Solytk's seconds start to hustle their utilizing them on the other, to get all the things that any other common little child ardently desires, smoking hot, by going one better than the skilled average."

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man off the field in professional disgust; kills Soltyk by accident; flees to the German border; and on the threshold of his native land gives himself up to the police (with considerable difficulty) and then hangs himself in his cell. "Herr Kreisler paid without comment what was claimed by the landlord in Paris, for his son's rooms; and writing to the authorities at the frontier-town about the burial, paid exactly the sum demanded by this town for disposing of the body."

3. THE IMPERFECT SAINT

THE SUPERIOR VITALITY OF THE KREISLER SECTIONS OF THE novel is not due solely to their preoccupation with "the sprawling and surging of Life's animal hulks." It is due to the author's interests being more profoundly, if not more intensely, engaged with Kreisler and his fate than with Tarr's ideas. It is not the only time we shall find Lewis surreptitiously backing a rival horse. We find ourselves absorbed by whatever Kreisler does. Tarr's actions—his kicking of Hobson's hat, his comings and goings, drinkings, observings and retrospections—are not more banal than Kreisler's entanglements with pawnbrokers, German women, and Russian fanatics; but they are too whimsically motivated to claim any more significance than the bustle of a stage-crew between the monologues of a one-man play. To a complaint that Tarr lacks the feel of life, the author would reply that he isn't supposed to exude it: he is a Lewisian artist, and his vitality has been absorbed by his intellect. Certainly his harangues are electrifying; displaying all Lewis's pamphleteering skill, they are the most

quotable, if not ultimately the most impressive, parts of the book.

Yet though Tarr's forensic energy efficiently counterpoises Kreisler's heavy rhetoric of action, one cannot exorcise a conviction of the title figure's inferior density. This disquieting impression can be localized in the last part of the book, where Tarr, who has up to now only played at being involved with the other characters, is at last presented in potentially significant action. He has finally disengaged himself from Bertha and capitulated to the heroic claims of Anastasya, whose proud massive anatomy ("swagger sex") holds "all the imagery of a perfect world." It looks like the mating of complementary giants; but at the last moment he marries Bertha instead to legitimize a child who is really the dead Kreisler's.

He offers this recourse, within seconds of being told of her pregnancy, with a quiet directness that seems meant to partake of sanctity, in pointed opposition to Kreisler's lurid preoccupation with Self.

"Whose child is it?"

"Kreisler's."

"There you are!" he thought.

He got up and stepped over to her with a bright relieved look in his face.

"Poor little girl! That's a bad business.—But don't worry about it. We can get married and it can always pass as mine; if we do it quickly enough."

She looked up at him obliquely and sharply, with suspicion grown a habit. When she saw the pleasant, assured expression, she saw that at last things had turned. . . .

This instantaneous beneficence isn't unprepared for: in the days before the duel a vague intention of safeguarding

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Bertha had led him to keep evening watch on Kreisler. But as soon as made, the gesture is neutralized by further rearrangements.

Self-interest affords Tarr some grounds for rationalizing his precipitancy, since he has always had his doubts about the propriety of wedding Art to an incarnation of the perfections possible to Life.

None of his ego was required by his new woman. She possessed plenty of her own.=This, he realized later, was the cause of his lack of attachment. He needed an empty vessel to flood with his vitality, and not an equal and foreign vitality to coldly exist side by side with. He had taken into sex the procédés and selfish arrangements of life in general. He had humanized sex too much.

There is no danger of a relationship with Bertha being overhumanized. After the marriage they walk to the Luxembourg Gardens and come to a tame understanding about Anastasya. Tarr is to go on seeing her.

"I am afraid I shall seem unkind.=This is not a nice marriage for you.=Perhaps I was wrong to suggest it?"

"How, wrong?—I have not been complaining."

That night at his usual dinner with Anastasya,

"I saw Bertha to-day," he said, forcing the opening at last.

"You still see her, then."

"Yes.=I married her this afternoon."

Though the faintly comic offhandedness of Lewis's presentation is novel, one needn't be a fan of Marie Corelli's to find it unsatisfactory. We don't expect Wyndham Lewis to send his hero to the matrimonial scaffold with a Sidney Carton's turbulent sanctimoniousness, amid swelling waves of approbatory prose. Nor is it really disturbing to

see the unselfishness of Tarr's provision for Bertha eviscerated by his relief at escaping an undivided commitment to Anastasya. What is unsatisfactory is the neutrality with which he settles down between the two, Bertha from four to seven, "his illicit and splendid bride" by night. Presumably he is satisfying deep and contradictory emotional needs, but Lewis's strategic refusal to deal with them invites the unlucky suspicion that he isn't sure what they are. In attempting to humanize Arghol—to envisage, that is, an artist-protagonist to whom the categories "hero" and "cad" will seem irrelevant—he has maneuvered his characters into a closing tableau that, but for the clipped austerity of the presentation, would invite faint titters. In the figure of Tarr, it becomes clear, Lewis has sought to conceive, for his own use rather than the reader's, a new kind of human being, a saint without a supernatural, his mind fixed on the affairs of the creative will, while the visible part of him moves unruffled, endlessly accommodating, willing to adapt itself to any configuration of circumstances in obedience to a few elementary maxims of self-respect. Tarr is always the spectator, detached from the heady events he superintends, not with that "scientific" detachment which is itself a rhetoric and in various polemics undergoes Lewis's specific reprehension, but with the whimsical curiosity of the involuntary eye. In him we are meant to see the creative personality functioning freely in the world and relegating the merely personal to the plane of triviality to which Art banishes all contingency.

This corresponds to a division between the body and the mind, in which "Life," particularly its sexual aspect,

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is dealt with mechanically, and so prevented from corroding the cerebral realm with its juices. As if to underline this point, two of the Lewis protagonists are equipped with artificial legs; Snooty Baronet's squeaks when he takes Val on his iron knee. Another protagonist, Ker-Orr in *The Wild Body*, writes "This forked, strange-scented, blond-skinned gut-bag, with its two bright rolling marbles with which it secs, bull's-eyes full of mockery and madness, is my stalking-horse. I hang somewhere in its midst operating it with detachment." In the process of reorienting his energies toward Art, Arghol willingly surrenders to abstraction his corporeal and social existence. Of course, the difficulty, which Lewis spent the next quarter-century trying to get round, is that Arghol must find a humane way of dealing with other people, who aren't, as he is, all mind: aren't in fact, by his criteria, even real.

In *Tarr* this question is brilliantly begged; Tarr, we are immediately told, "had no social machinery but the cumbersome one of the intellect. He danced about with this, it is true. But it was full of sinister piston-rods, organ-like shapes, heavy drills.—When he tried to be amiable, he usually only succeeded in being ominous." When he talks to Hobson ("It was an effort") his nervous force "got to work and wove its large anomalous patterns." He doesn't have intercourse with people, in short; he performs before them; this is simply asserted, as a humorous cachet of his intelligence. Unfortunately, as he is half-aware, the requirements of his final involvement with Anastasya and Bertha can't be met by a performance. Lewis, having no solution to this impasse between the creative personality

and the claims of other people's personal existence, very rapidly finishes off the narrative with a maximum of objectivity and trusts no one will notice.

Tarr, finally, is more than a theory for his creator; he is a specialization of Lewis's unique sensibility. Hence, some of these troubles are implicated in the creation of the other characters also. The characters are all a little dead. They seem coherently conceived, inviolable to protests of reason or of sentiment. Yet they never *interact*. Some of them have dealings with each other. Others are drawn into the holocaust of the expiring Kreisler. But just as Tarr seems unable to imagine the wound to Bertha's soul implied by his unique matrimonial arrangements, so his author never presents persons undergoing mutual modification. They may alter direction after contact with one another, but they are not modified. They remain the same sensitive but inviolable robots.

Nor do they really talk to each other. Tarr lectures other people. Kreisler, at the opposite extreme, springs into characteristic verbal action in their presence, as though the visitor's tread had started up a factory. The people between these poles conduct prolonged wary negotiations by maneuvering locutions in uniformed squads.

These people are not dummies; the presentation of their working sensibilities is astonishingly sensitive and direct. Kreisler's blood, "one heavy mass, hustled about in him, up and down, like a sturgeon in a narrow tank." On another occasion, meditating a rendezvous, "He was compelled, in short, to go, to have done with it. The worrying obsession of not having done it intimidated him. In the empty evening he would have been at the mercy of this thing-not-

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done, like an itch." No one can surpass Lewis in this blend of analysis and imagery to convey obscure motives. Yet as Kreisler is aware only of Kreisler, so Lewis is aware of only one character at a time. Himself imprisoned by the solipsism he has taught his protagonists, he can make us feel vividly how Anastasya at a crucial moment responds to Tarr—"Anastasya looked blankly into him, as though he contained cheerless stretches where no living thing would grow"—or how Tarr appraises Anastasya—"Her revolving hips and thudding skirts carried her forward with the orchestral majesty of a simple ship. He suddenly became conscious of the monotonous racket."—but never how these profound awarenesses by one person of the phenomena presented by another can get included in a more comprehensive vision.

4. TARR INTO CANTELMAN

LEWIS JOINED THE ARMY AS A BOMBARDIER, SHORTLY AFTER finishing *Tarr*, and took his problems with him to France. Out of the complex experience of the war came two new efforts at focus: a story called "Cantelman's Spring-Mate" and an essay, "Inferior Religions."

"Cantelman's Spring-Mate,"³ the best of his early stories, which Joyce and Pound admired and on account of which, it is now difficult to believe, an issue of the *Little Review* was banned from the mails three years before the more notorious *affaire Bloom*, presents a new Lewis persona, an amalgam of Tarr's detachment and Kreisler's scornful

³ Reprinted 1953 in the *Little Review Anthology*.

sensuality. This fusion is conveyed by a new mutation of the Lewis prose, a thick suave pigment, marvelously sensuous, yet crisper and more conscious than anything in *Tarr*. The affairs of the body—specifically, sexual affairs—are consigned, Tarr-fashion, to mechanism; they aren't touched by Kreisler's hysterical sense of doom. At least, Cantelman doesn't think they are. He is free, therefore, to indulge in Kreislerian sensualities, and if only because he doesn't fend off the sensual world with an epigram, his human reality is superior to that of Tarr. He notices the redness of a chance girl's cheeks, the animal fulness of the childbearing hips, "with an eye as innocent as the bird or the beast," and laughs "without shame or pleasure."

Cantelman is an infantry officer on leave; hence his urgent compulsion to bring the world into focus as a Dance of Death. He is half conscious, half animal; and it is human consciousness that has brought the War about. "Had it not been for that unmaterial gift that some bungling or wild hand had bestowed, our sisters and brothers would be no worse than dogs or sheep. . . . Should not the sad human amalgam, all it did, all it willed, all it demanded, be thrown over, for the fake and confusion that it was, and should not such as possessed a greater quantity of that wine of reason retire, metaphorically, to the wilderness, and sit forever in a formal and gentle elation, refusing to be disturbed?"

This is the Tarr component of Cantelman talking: Cantelman is a Tarr whom the exigencies of war have pressed into enforced brotherhood with legions of inferior beings. In his Parisian art world, Tarr moved freely enough not to

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have thoughts about other people forced on him. They were foolish, no doubt, but their foolishness wasn't dragging *him* toward death. Cantelman's "present occupation, the trampling boots on his feet, the belt that crossed his back, was his sacrifice, his compliment to, the animal." No such sacrifice was exacted of Tarr. Kreisler underwent that for him.

The army hasn't even nonanimal compensations. Cantelman regards his brother-officers with "steady gnawing anger at such a concentration of furious foolishness." He shares their uniform but not their fatuous veneration for their own status as officers and gentlemen. Out of disgust with the human ("the newspapers were the things that stank most on earth, and human beings anywhere were the most ugly and offensive of the brutes because of the confusion caused by their consciousness"), he decides, since no rational oasis offers itself, to retreat to "the madness of natural things" and take a casual spring mate; the creatures of nature in spring are busily copulating, and neither copulation nor death is for the bird or the insect anything but a mechanically violent matter of course. Since an animal occupation is exacted of him, he may as well play the part fully.

In the narrow road where they got away from the village, Cantelman put his arm around Stella's waist and immediately experienced all the sensations that he had been divining in the creatures around him; the horse, the bird, and the pig. The way in which Stella's hips stood out, the solid blood-heated expanse on which his hand lay, had the amplitude and flatness of a mare. Her lips had at once no practical significance, but only the aesthetic embellishment of a bull-like flower.

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He immediately discerns that Nature has trapped his antiromanticism in romance, that his appetites, instead of revenging him on the merely human, have engaged him with death. Stella is, like all women, he reflects, "contaminated with Nature's hostile power."

With a treachery worthy of a Hun, Nature tempted him towards her. He was drugged with delicious appetites. Very well he would hoist the unseen power with his own petard. He would throw back Stella where she was discharged from, (if it were allowable, now, to change her into a bomb) first having relieved himself of this humiliating gnawing and yearning in his blood.

So on their third meeting, when she enfolds him "with long arms, full of the contradictory and offending fire of spring," Cantelman to the ceaseless tune of a nightingale turns to "the devouring of his mate." "He felt that he was raiding the bowels of Nature, not fecundating the Aspasias of our flimsy flesh, or assuaging, or competing with, the nightingale." He remains convinced that his gesture of contemptuous possession has outwitted Nature; in the trenches he reads gravely through her frequent letters about an expected child without comment, and fails to perceive that the animal world, in so perpetuating itself, has in fact made use of him.

The theme of this story, that one's willed assessment of the emotional texture of things does not in fact liberate one from their logic, is crucial in Lewis's best fiction. That at least is what Lewis would want the commentator to say. In point of fact, a certain critical charity is involved in calling it the theme of "Cantelman." One needs to read very closely and sympathetically to see that though Cantelman twice creates his own poetic world, each time under

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the impression that he is seeing things as they are, he is all the time unawares playing an insignificant part in a real world inaccessible to human notation. A less finicky reading reveals Lewis's prime energy flowing into Illusion No. 1, Cantelman's "tough" identification of himself with the amatory processes of nature, and an imperfect contrast between this and Illusion No. 2, Cantelman's "undeceived" perception that "the miraculous camouflage of Nature" harbors "everywhere gun-pits and 'nests of death.'" The final sentences, where schematically the screw should turn, sound tacked on: "And when he beat a German's brains out, it was with the same impartial malignity that he had displayed in the English night with his spring-mate. Only he considered there, too, that he was in some way outwitting Nature; he had no adequate realization of the extent to which, evidently, the death of a Hun was to the advantage of the animal world."

Animal life thrives on death and is polarized toward it; hence the more animal people are, the more lethal. The paradox that won't quite dissipate is that one doesn't deal with animals but with "the sad human amalgam." Whether you try to deal with it as rational or as animal, the presence of the other component prevents it from seeming quite real. "Inferior Religions" (published in 1917) is an attempt to focus, in a way useful to the artist, this conviction of human unreality and the contrary conviction of human significance.

Lewis the artist has been intensely interested in people all his working life ("who would paint a tree when he could paint a man?"); it has been an anomalous, trancelike interest, however. It is in part professional necessity that

underlies this anomalousness. The painter who responds not to a fashionable itch but to a deep creative necessity contemplates people because he wants to do something with them. They are food for his work. The nature of his work requires him to concentrate on their animal integuments; but the emotions behind this work (assuming that he is not painting them because he is paid to), the emotions which he will seek to incarnate in his rendering of this integument, preoccupy him with their saturnine inscrutability; it is difficult to say whether they are emotions engendered in him by creative pressure alone, or by his response to some mystery concealed in his subjects. So what sort of reality underlies this animal form was a subject for Lewisian speculations from the days when the young painter, fresh from two years at Rugby and two more at the Slade School of Art, was working in Paris and Munich and spending summers in Brittany.

In coastal Brittany, his first lunar world, where the peasant language, still Celtic, bristles with angry sibilants, Lewis first cultivated his novelist's eye. "The Atlantic air, the raw rich visual food of the barbaric environment, the squealing of the pipes, the crashing of the ocean, induced a creative torpor. Mine was now a drowsy sun-baked ferment, watching with delight the great comic effigies which erupted beneath my rather saturnine but astonished gaze." The three stories in the 1909 *English Review* are sketches of these comic effigies; "Inferior Religions" was written to preface a fuller collection of them, which for various reasons did not appear until 1927 (*The Wild Body*). The Breton figures are "intricately moving bobbins"; Brotcotnaz for instance, a fisherman who regularly beats his wife,

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"is fascinated by one object, one at once another vitality. He bangs up against it wildly at regular intervals, blackens it, contemplates it, moves round it and dreams. All such fascination is religious."

But this activity, while comic, is mechanical: the intricate lurching of the carapace. When you see people in that way, you are ignoring whatever warmth and allure human beings put forth. That is precisely why this way of seeing recommended itself to Lewis as an artistic vision. That is also why he discarded the sensuous part of the "Cantelman" prose—a rich enough medium for sexual themes to make D. H. Lawrence sound philosophic—and exaggerated its crispness to the point of mechanism. Instead of, Rubens-like, "borrowing the colour of Life's crude blood, tracing the sprawling and surging of its animal hulks," the artist desiderated by him would recognize that human reality lies far below blood and hulks. But since human realities are inaccessible to inspection, he would remain convinced of the essential *unreality* of the "personality" whose gestures he can depict. It is a screen maneuvered in front of the unspeakable, or in front of a void. Hence the most arresting section of the essay:

The chemistry of personality (subterranean in a sort of cemetery, whose decompositions are our lives) puffs up in frigid balls, soapy Snowmen, arctic carnival-masks, which we can photograph and fix.

Upwards from the surface of existence a lurid and dramatic scum oozes and accumulates into the characters we see. The real and tenacious poisons, the sharp forces of vitality, do not socially transpire. . . . Capriciously, however, the froth-forms of these darkly-contrived machines twist and puff in the air, in our legitimate and liveried masquerade.

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Though this social world, the artist's material, is unreal, we have now discovered its significance. What it signifies is the degree of tension within.

You may blow away a man-of-bubbles with a burgundian gust of laughter, but that is not a personality, it is an apparition of no importance. But so much correspondence has it with its original that, if the cadaveric travail beneath it is vigorous and bitter, the dummy or mask will be of a more original grotesqueness.

There are duller lives, however, for whom this chemical imagery of ferment and travail would imply too much. They are the robot ready-mades of his next group of novels (1927-32); ". . . a certain category of spirit that is not quite inanimate and yet not very funny. It consists of those who take, at the Clarkson's⁴ situated at the opening of our lives, some conventional Pierrot costume. This is intended to assure them a minimum of strain, of course, and so is a capitulation. In order to evade life we must have recourse to these uniforms, but such a choice leaves nothing but the white and ethereal abstraction of the shadow of laughter."

Impressively written as this is, it really brings us back to *Tarr* again. "The travail within" remains private. There is still no formula for envisaging these persons in interaction. Their social machinery interacts, their mechanical bodies interact, and that is all. The essential person—whatever that may be—is enclosed in his private world. What has happened is that Lewis's way of visualizing his characters one at a time has been elevated into a theory about the way the characters exist. And all this—and so all Lewis's fiction—has its germ in the entranced sun-baked torpor

⁴ Clarkson's: London theatrical costumer's.

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with which Lewis, himself congealed, he has confessed, "in a kind of cryptic immaturity," observed on the Breton shingle the primitive antics of an alien race.

The writing of *Tarr*, he has recalled, was among the experiences that caused him to commence painting in two parallel modes, by turns adhering to Nature and ignoring her. In the more intimate and sensitive modalities of language, he sought two such polarized idioms with more difficulty. By compelling him to work in terms of simulated human beings, *Tarr* revealed what obstacles the metaphysics of the human personality imposes to the enterprise of creating yourself first and an accommodating world second. For twenty years thereafter Lewis's fiction pursued the mechanisms of comic abstraction, while his tireless speculative energy, in the disguise of an enemy in Bloomsbury's camps, explored problems of metaphysics.

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All effectual men are always the enemies of every time. With that fundamental divergence, they give a weight of impartiality to the supreme thesis and need of their age. Any opinion of their fellows that they adopt they support with the uncanny authority of a plea from a hostile camp.

—Tarr

1. CREATING A "SELF"

ARGHOL IN 1914 DISTRUSTED THE SELF AS A NODULE OF CORRUPTION adhering to the solitary creative soul. It is on the artist's Selfhood that Hanps can batten. They are impotent to mimic his creativeness, but they can mimic his personality. The Selfhood is also the point at which he can be destroyed. "Only one operation can cure it—the suicide's knife." It is the "vulgar streak" in his lonely austerity. Vincent Penhale in 1941 cures the Self by Arghol's prescription: appalled at its excrescences, he hangs himself. But in the years between *The Enemy of the Stars* and *The Vulgar Streak* Lewis, not wanting to be trapped like Tarr, cultivated the Self assiduously, as the means by which the creative principle could be personified and made to live in the world. He abandoned the whimsi-

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cality of the imperfect saint for the defences of a ferocious ego. His concern was to paint like a force of Nature without handing his brush to the *Zeitgeist*; he needed a Self to fend the *Zeitgeist* off. This Self was later christened "The Enemy." Also, because of the social nature of language, it is impossible to *write* like a force of Nature. You have to invent some sort of personality to speak the words, or else leave the words to coerce one into spectral existence without your approval. So in the preface to *Time and Western Man* he applauds with a new personal vehemence the act of creation whereby a Tarr brings forth "the Artist himself, a new sort of person: the creative man":

For our only terra firma in a boiling and shifting world is, after all, our "self." That must cohere for us to be capable at all of behaving in any way but as mirror-images of alien realities, or as the most helpless and lowest organisms, as worms or sponges.

In the midst of Cartesian doubt, the formula for not being a crowd is to attack, for hygienic reasons, a great many things that contradict what you have selected as your deepest impulse, even if, or especially if, you feel a "natural" attraction or sympathy for them. Art must always repudiate the slack ways of the natural.

I have said to myself that I will fix my attention upon those things that have most meaning for me. All that seems to me to contradict or threaten those things I will do my best to modify or to defeat, and whatever I see that favors and strengthens those things I will support and do my best to strengthen. In consequence, I shall certainly be guilty of injustice, the heraclitean "injustice of the opposites." But how can we evade our destiny of being "an opposite," except by becoming some grey mixture, that is in reality just nothing at all?

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"Those things that have most meaning for me" appears at first sight to be a circular phrase; for until there is a "me" we cannot say what has meaning for it, and it is the process of creating a "me" that we are describing. Lewis explains how he has met this difficulty:

I have allowed these contradictory things to struggle together, and the group that has proved the most powerful I have fixed upon as my most essential ME. This decision has not, naturally, suppressed or banished the contrary faction, almost equal in strength, indeed, and even sometimes in the ascendant. And I am by no means above spending some of my time with this domestic Adversary. All I have said to myself is that always, when it comes to the pinch, I will side and identify myself with the powerfulest Me, and in its interests I will work.

These statements, it will be noticed, establish a liaison between two separate processes: combating external phenomena that menace your activities, and dealing with a congeries of impulses within yourself whose interests are not your main ones. On the cover of *Count Your Dead: They Are Alive!*, an antiwar pamphlet of the late thirties, is a device which Lewis meant to epitomize the international situation of that time (an almost contemporaneous book has for subtitle, "How to Make a War About Nothing"), but which in fact succeeds in elucidating better than many words his own polemic energy. A vivid little figure, weapons brandished, dances toward the reader on multiple legs, its broad face leering in menacing grimace. Closer inspection resolves what seemed a nose into the narrow space between two profiles; two figures, closely matched, are at each other's throats, instead of a single monster threatening *us*. This metaphysic of the personality

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is first set forth in a "Vortex" headed "Be Thyself" in the second number of *Blast* (1915):

. . . Why try and give the impression of a consistent and indivisible personality? . . .

There is Yourself, and there is the External World, that fat mass you browse on.

You knead it into an amorphous imitation of yourself inside yourself.

Sometimes you speak through its huskier mouth, sometimes through yours.

Do not confuse yourself with it, or weaken the esoteric lines of fine original being. . . .

This is Arghol's recipe, of course; Arghol is simply the Self Lewis has elected as central. The impulses so focused reach their most entertaining expression in "The Code of a Herdsman," a set of precepts published in the *Little Review* (July 1917):

(1) Never maltreat your own intelligence with parables. It is a method of herd-hypnotism. Do not send yourself to sleep with the rhythm of the passes that you make. . . .

(2) Do not admit *cleverness*, in any form, into your life. Observe the accomplishment of some people's signatures! It is the herd-touch. . . .

(6) Yourself must be your caste.

(7) Cherish and develop, side by side, your six most constant indications of different personalities. You will then acquire the potentiality of six men. . . .

(10) . . . Do not allow yourself to imagine "a fine herd though still a herd." There is no *fine herd*. The cattle that call themselves "gentlemen" you will observe to be a little cleaner. It is merely cunning and produced with a product called *soap*. . . .

(18) Above all this sad commerce with the herd, let something veritably remain "un peu sur la montagne." Always come down with masks and thick clothing to the valley where we work.

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Stagnant gasses from these Yahoosque and rotten herds are more dangerous often than the wandering cylinders that emit them. See that you are not caught in them without your mask. = But once returned to our adorable height, forget your fallow task: with great freedom indulge your love. = The terrible processions beneath are not of our making and are without our pity. Our sacred hill is a volcanic heaven. But the result of its violence is peace. = The unfortunate surge below, even, has moments of peace.

This is Arghol's "Anything but yourself is dirt" glazed by the comic vision into handsome order. The formal and scrupulous tone is as much a purifying agent as the typography of the Blasts and Blesses. Recognizing as it does with its touch of the avuncular the possibility of other and messier tones, it converts misanthropy into art. Since "The Code of a Herdsman" doesn't have to contend with the human, it comes off somewhat better than *Tarr*.

2. THE CALIPH AND MACHIAVELLI

SELF IS DEFINED BY FUNCTION. THE VORTICIST IN HIS "volcanic heaven" creates, instead of fussing over Nature's creations. Nature does her own sort of creating better than we can ("We could not make an elephant"). The Impressionist therefore is a parasite on her creative power. He inhabits without a qualm "the unfortunate surge below." He is the more pleased the more casual his painting looks, the more it exalts noticing over knowing, the more its subjects seem immersed in the drowsy stream of Time. To the Impressionist's cousin, the trenchant wiseacre who says, "After all, LIFE is the important thing!" the Arghol-persona of the *Blast* manifestoes severely retorts,

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Nature will give you . . . grass enough for a cow or a sheep, any fleshly conquest you can compass. One thing she is unable to give, that that is peculiar to men. Such stranger stuff men must get out of themselves.

In those brave days ("We will convert the King if possible. A VORTICIST KING! WHY NOT?") Lewis mobilized against those who "coo with lazy contentment," "in front of infinite Nature with their little paint-box," his troops of "proud, handsome, and predatory" Arghols.

Our Vortex is fed up with your dispersals, reasonable chicken-men.

Our Vortex is proud of its polished sides.

Our Vortex will not hear of anything but its disastrous polished dance.

Our Vortex desires the immobile rhythm of its swiftness.

Our Vortex rushes out like an angry dog at your Impressionist fuss.

Our Vortex is white and abstract with its red-hot swiftness.

As for "Life,"

The Vorticist is at his maximum point of energy when stillest.

The Vorticist is not the Slave of Commotion, but its Master.

The Vorticist does not suck up to Life.

He lets Life know its Place in a Vorticist Universe!

This campaign against Impressionism failed miserably; "Vorticism," even to Lewis's horror confounded with "Futurism," has become a lecture-room joke for use in offhand illustration of the ease with which "movements" could once be stirred up. The war, the British time-lag, and the resentment of Anglo-Saxon painters at "being asked to do a thing *twenty years before it was supposed to be done*" doomed the only attempt in history (with the dubious ex-

ception of Pre-Raphaelitism) to start in England an artistic revolution that had not already occurred on the continent. By 1919 Lewis was thoroughly aware that his note had become one of solitary defiance. "I have never felt in the least alone," he insists. "I was a group-animal, behaving as one of the solitary breeds by chance. . . . I had all the confidence of a herd—that was not there." This is a way of describing the flavor imparted to his polemics by the curiously impersonal energy we have noted in his painting. The tone, it is true, isn't selfish; but the center remains the Selfhood. During his years of tub-thumping his Self grows like a snowball. Ninety percent of the detail in *The Apes of God* owes its presence, one feels, to personal idiosyncrasy. The detail in *Tarr*, as we have seen, seems on the other hand to have gotten there the way weeds, dust, and circulars do. Neither of these can be recommended for imitation as an artistic process, but the casualness of *Tarr*, the sense it conveys of the author's disengagement, permits a richer illusion of life. The difference in self-consciousness between these two novels can be closely associated with the polemics that largely occupied the sixteen years between them. Since the nature of the Self is to be an opposite, it shapes itself in defining what it is opposed to.

Consequently Impressionism became for Lewis a sort of synecdoche for a whole deplorable view of life, ultimately for a set of interrelated political, social, and moral orthodoxies against which he felt himself ranged. Before 1920, of course, he knew what he was doing as a painter; but the problems posed by the writing of *Tarr* protracted his theoretical activities for many more years. As much as the

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failure of the Vortex and his experiences in the 1914-18 war, that effort to realize Arghol as a human being made him self-conscious about the way, as a novelist, he created, and brought to his attention the gap between conception and power.

This is the theme of *The Caliph's Design* (1919), a pamphlet which opens with the parable of the Caliph who designed a new city and then commanded his architects and engineers to transform it into fact. Since they knew that their heads would fall if the working drawings were not ready within twenty-four hours, their master was not disappointed.

Lewis's frame of mind in 1919 was that of the Caliph. ("The haphazard manner in which everything struggles and drifts into existence filled me with impatience," he has recalled. "I would have had a city born by fiat, as if out of the brain of a god, or someone with a god-like power.") Unfortunately, he lacked the Caliph's power. But in the course of hectoring somnolent architects (the pamphlet is subtitled "Architects! Where is your Vortex?"), he noted that, far from sharing his creative desires, the whole of "modernist" art was thriving on "the 'queer,' the 'amusing,' the divinely ugly, the exquisitely vulgar." It is true that "a stupid form is for the painter the same food as a stupid man for a writer like Gogol or Flaubert"; but Flaubert did not cohabit with his bourgeois as cozily as the cubists with their apples, mandolins, wineglasses, and newspapers. Instead he considered banality "a very sad and improper affair." The "School of Paris" was not satirizing but busily *copying*, in a romantic *faux-naïf* way and with many arch tricks of distortion, the paraphernalia

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of Bouvard and Pécuchet. Hanp as painter isn't merely Mr. Churchill squatted on his campstool or Mr. Eisenhower administering pigments with boyish self-deprecation. He is the reigning avant-garde, which in Lewis's view was siding with the Plain Man's distaste for the intellect. "Picasso, who started as an Impressionist, and his fellow-artists, made a fetish almost of a box of matches, a bottle of beer, an ugly vase or kitchen chair." Hence the Herdsman's axiom: "MATTER THAT HAS NOT SUFFICIENT MIND TO PERMEATE IT GROWS, AS YOU KNOW, GANGRENOUS AND ROTTEN." Hence the great polemic, *Time and Western Man*, of 1927; for it was with the benediction of official "thought" that the Hanps of the art world, being themselves mere executants instead of thinkers and so simply accepting ideas from higher up, were placing a premium upon the moment, upon the trivial, upon sensations that pass away. But Lewis chose the Vortex for his emblem because it negates the Stream, and because it is a spatial rather than a temporal image. The Vorticist, who spurns the allure of Nature to seek within himself the sterner and stranger stuff peculiar to men, makes Art a war against Time:

There is no Present—there is Past and Future, and there is Art. Any moment not weakly relaxed and slipping back, or, on the other hand, dreaming optimistically, is Art.

"Just Life" or soi-disant "Reality" is a fourth quantity, made up of the Past, the Future, and Art.

This impure Present our Vortex despises and ignores.

This "impure Present" is the subject of Lewis's polemics on Bloomsbury, where the Past, the Future, and "Art" were combined in a pseudo-enlightenment that in his as-

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sault on the *Transition* set he called "a sort of cheap and unnecessary, popularized *artistic-ness* of outlook, the creative faculty released into popular life, and possessed by everybody"—paradise of amateurs, middlemen, and Apes of God.

Highbrow taste in England was under the supervision of a gang of Kreislers who, with their ecstatic gushings, their coy genuflections toward the luxury trade of collector and art dealer, and their epicene cult of "the aesthetic thrill," were flattering Everyman's predisposition to transform art into sex. The artist, Lewis asserted severely in the teeth of Clive Bell and Roger Fry, "is older than the fish."

The few centuries that separate him from the savage are a mere flea-bite to the distance his memory must stretch if it is to strike the fundamental slime of creation. And it is this condition, the very first gusto of creation in this scale of life in which we are set, that he must reach before he, in his turn, can create!

The creation of a work of art is an act of the same description as the evolution of wings on the side of a fish, the feathering of its fins; or the invention of a weapon within the body of a hymenopter to enable it to meet the terrible needs of its life. . . .

Surrounded by an official taste that was busy prostituting everything creative to the reigning conception of prettiness, Lewis noted glumly that the Frys and Bells had all power on their side.

In any synthesis of the universe, the harsh, the hirsute, the enemies of the rose, must be built in for the purposes as much of a fine aesthetic, as of a fine logical structure.

Far from taking cognizance of the harsh and the hirsute, Roger Fry could even be quoted in the act of rhapsodizing

about the tiles in the South Kensington Museum refreshment room.

Meditating his own position—a Caliph without a headman—and that of the Bloomsbury impresarios, busily promoting what looked “advanced” and was really the silly aesthetic of Hanp, Lewis entered a second period of semi-retirement, in which his only signs of life were the two issues of *The Tyro* (1921–22). In the first number he announced that amid the protracted and expensive obsequies of a time broken off by the war a new age was in preparation. “We are the creatures of a new state of human life, as different from Nineteenth Century England, say, as the Renaissance was from the Middle Ages.” A sort of no man’s land atmosphere was currently in existence: “as yet there is Nothing, or rather the corpse of the past age, and the sprinkling of children of the new.” He also remarked on the resemblance between Wyndham Lewis, painter and author, and the virtuosos of the Italian Renaissance, when “no one was surprised to see a man chiselling words and stone alternately.”

His next step was an anatomy of this hopeful parallel of the Renaissance. This is contained in *The Lion and the Fox*, which was written during the four-year retreat but not published until 1927. In that efflorescent time,

Science was not . . . a thing to cut the world in two, into human and non-human; . . . the conduct of a business negotiation, the painting of a picture, arranging a cavalry attack, courting a sharp-witted woman, choosing a doublet, or making a thermometer, were all on one plane of reasoned effort, objects of exact analysis, offering the intelligence a similar delight.

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Yet though there was then no paradox in locating the artistic impulse in the intelligence, the Italian Renaissance could not lean massively on the life of the time. It was as precarious a movement as Vorticism.

With a pathetic haste, and in a worldly competitive rush, these few generations of men trod on the heels of each other's achievements. They brought to birth gigantic and disparate masterpieces, which had too little congruity with the life around them. Tintoretto would paint his huge canvases in two days, and these wall-paintings are full of imposing architectures that did not exist, and were placed in surroundings that they dwarf, or that do not suit them.

The necessity for this inspired botching lies deep in the nature of European society, always in some way preoccupied with Time. Haste infected these artists and "gave the sudden renaissance flowering the appearance of a theatrical entertainment."

The society for which it was organized was not secure enough or deeply enough established to give it such an immemorial foundation as is required by the perfect products of such a culture as that of China or Egypt. In the baroque of the jesuit counter-revolution it lapsed without disguise into an immense theatrical display, hardly more solid than the scenery of a ballet or court entertainment. It rose frothing but stark into a false imperialistic opulence, whose charm was its grimacing untruth, in which the *beauty of vulgarity* was patented, and which we weakly parody to-day.

The next paragraph places Vorticism in a diminishing perspective of cultural landmarks.

Always these bursts of dilottante culture in Europe grow feebler and shorter; they are cut short by wars; or a little shifting of the political centre, and they snuff out. The death or failure of a single individual is enough to give them a mortal blow. . . . They have nothing

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behind them, they are an affair of *individuals*. . . . Their little heroic attempt at "civilization" is played against an alien background, with whose life, progressively diminishing in significance, they have no connection.

You have a "culture" when some individuals detach themselves from this background. When they have done that, they are likely to turn around and examine it, as Machiavelli did. At home among men whose sensibility didn't ward off the spiky and hirsute, Machiavelli applied his intelligence to the phenomena of power, producing in *Il Principe* "the best ABC of Power ever compiled," and an analysis of the human average in which Lewis finds nothing to contradict. People, in Lewis's view, are never politically free; somebody is always ruling them, and the illusion of freedom may be one of his anaesthetics. Every interest and appetite of "life" can be, and generally is, invisibly organized to serve the ends of power. Machiavelli, for Lewis, was neither devil nor angel; he didn't invent Machiavellism, he observed its ubiquity. And his candor seems to Lewis the appropriate climate of mind for art, liberating the artist as it does from all compulsion to traffic in Life's corrupted emotions.

. . . What great art is not utopian? A canon of Japanese art forbade the use of shadows in a picture as being insignificant accompaniments of our chief physical reality. All the greatest art is inclined to refuse or to discipline into something less hot and fluid such shadows as are cast every day by the half-witted excesses of the puny frantic animal crossed in his appetites and flying for a moment above life's surface in isolated uncontrol.

Machiavelli, however, is the theorist of action and is seduced by its allure; action excludes thought ("Truth

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has no place in Action," Lewis wrote in 1919) and values not the finished thing but the excitement of getting it. Shakespeare, the principal subject of *The Lion and the Fox*, subscribes to this tough and unloving view of human beings without succumbing to Machiavelli's love for the man who translates it into power. Hence his appearance before "the savage rabble of the Elizabethan pit" as a ritual executioner of heroes. His "peaceable, humdrum manner of life" resembles that of "those hangmen who when not engaged on their terrible trade are grocers or barbers in some small provincial town." So his Art, like Tarr's, is the antithesis of Life; Life—action—is the meaningless stuff he made it out of. Storms rage beneath his rather vacuous face, bland as a mirror; he himself is "a greater *hero* than any of the figures he depicted; in spectacular glory and renown no physical achievement could surpass his." The drama behind the mirror is what enlivens the fatuous actions—bloodshed, deceit, copulation—of the Macbeths and Richards whom the mirror reflects.

This Shakespeare is the successor of Tarr; *The Lion and the Fox* is Lewis's second attempt to envisage the artist in the round, this time with Renaissance sanctions. Shakespeare/Lewis was a sufficiently successful creation to serve as fulcrum for a new account of the Not-self against which Wyndham Lewis was fulfilling his "destiny of being 'an opposite.'" This account is contained in *The Art of Being Ruled*, *Time and Western Man*, *Paleface*, *The Diabolical Principle*, and *The Doom of Youth*, a group of books in which, between 1926 and 1932, Lewis pulled into an unforgettably brilliant pattern the "angry senseless music" of the disintegration of the western consciousness.

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These books rest on the assumption that Machiavelli was right: those who possess power (and power has many disguises) are, solely for the sake of exercising it, herding the rest of the population hither and thither, and performing on them every operation that will make them easier to herd. This has always happened; the peculiar feature of the twentieth century is that no one knows it is going on. Is not the age of tyrants supposed to be dead? The difference between the contemporary Herdsman and Lewis's metaphorical alter ego is that the latter possesses a Code, attesting to his inherent superiority. He isn't a nobody whose hands have casually fallen on the levers of power. He doesn't, in fact, herd people at all. He merely acknowledges without sentiment that they are a herd, and stays on his mountain.

Somebody has to herd them, however, and since power is the ubiquitous principle of human affairs, Lewis, though he never persuaded himself that it was either beneficent or lovely, preferred the man who exercised it openly and hence with some show of responsibility. In 1931 a new Arghol-image was, hastily run up, a man named Hitler who when he started behaving with spectacular lack of sense was later converted, without much difficulty, into a Hanp (*The Hitler Cult*: 1939).

3. THE GODS OF TIME

IN 1927, HOWEVER, HITLER WAS STILL IN THE FUTURE, AND Lewis alone, with his image of Shakespeare to prop him, was busily opposing The Time. The liaison between The

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Time and "Time" is explained in the editorial to the second issue of *The Enemy* (1927):

"History" is just what occurs, what gets into Time, as opposed to what does not, or what remains latent, unused or unexplored: that is the directest meaning of "history." And the "Destiny-idea," about which Spengler makes so much fuss, is, again, just that: what is, is. . . . It is the religion of Fate, and it is called "History."

All rhetoric about "manifest destiny," about "modernity" or "the spirit of the age," comes down, for Lewis, to that: genuflection before the random visage discernible in what happens to have happened. He was exacerbad not so much by the events as by their succession being deified into a massive trend:

All other times have bred criticism. . . . Only *this* time exacts an uncritical sleep of all within it. This, as elsewhere I am showing, is the sleep of the machine, or humanly, of the mass. . . . We have become so conscious of this obsessing "Time" that we tend to personalize it.

This was a discernment of great accuracy. Since Hanp by hypothesis seeks safety in numbers, Lewis in any age would have been in opposition. "Life" is what the herd is doing, and Art is the enemy of "Life," of what happens "naturally." Life passes through time and dies, whereas Art, as Tarr explained to Anastasya, "is ourselves disentangled from death and accident. . . . Anything living, quick and changing, is bad art, always." But with the momentum of his opposition, Lewis was enabled to discern as did no one else a special and unusual fact about the twentieth century: flux was not being taken for granted, it was being hypostatized. *La durée*, as Bergson had been explaining when the young Lewis visited his Paris lecture-

room early in the century, was the only reality. The *Self* was being cut up into chronological compartments; Hanp was being told not only that he was a new man every morning, but that he was really not a man at all but a congeries of mental occurrences. "It thinks here" is as good sense as 'it rains here,' the thought merely getting a certain colour from where it occurs. . . . We are the spot where a bundle of things is tied: we are the intersection of a multitude of paths." Simultaneously the pennies, chairs, and bricks of the *Not-Self* were being reduced to a series of "spatial apparitions made up of pure instantaneous sensations, enclosed in a temporal pen or corral." Everything, mental and physical, was being handed over to sensate "life," beyond the reach alike of the Intelligence and of Art. People didn't claim to be thinking, they claimed to be interpreting the sense of the age; nor did they claim that there was anything there to think about, only the sensations presented by one's "point of view."

This, reduced to essentials, is the argument of *Time and Western Man*, one of the dozen or so most important books of the twentieth century. The facts it surveys have become common knowledge; its value arises from its violently partisan tone. Disliking as he did the whole direction of contemporary philosophic thought, Lewis was able to expose its extraordinarily ramifying consequences in art, morals, and politics with a thoroughness and vividness denied to the submissive denizen of the time-stream. "Between Personality and Mankind it is always a question of dog and cat," said Arghol. So it didn't surprise Lewis at all that Science, with its cult of anonymity and impersonality, should be busily destroying, by means of be-

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haviorist doctrines, the concept of the Person. A mass-mind, furthermore, offers advantages to Machiavelli's devotee of Power:

Politically, of course (and envisaging science as the supreme functioning of the consciousness of the crowd), 'consciousness' is equally objectionable. For so long as that, in any sense, and in whatever disguise, holds out, it is very difficult to get the *individual* firmly by the scruff of the neck, and seat of the trousers, and fling him into the 'Unconscious.' How the 'Unconscious' comes to be the great democratic stronghold that it is, may require, in passing, a little further explanation.

The 'Unconscious' is really what Plato meant by the "mob of the senses," or rather it is where they are to be found, the mother region of "sensational" life. It is in "our Unconscious" that we live in a state of common humanity. There are no *individuals* in the Unconscious; because a man is only an individual when he is conscious. . . .

It is because Lewis is so far from disinterested that *Time and Western Man* sparkles with epithetic vigor. The section on "Testers" is a minor comic classic.

Professor Watson is, however, the one who has most to say for himself—whose "testing" has a philosophy attached to it. It only consists of a few words repeated in various ways, like an opinionated but quite straightforward parrot: for if you deny the existence of everything except knee-jumps there is not much to say about life. It is a very austere position indeed, and you can become a man of few words. . . .

Everything he touches in the book becomes animated in this way. The causation of Professor Alexander

. . . does not become its 'effect' with any *entrain*. It can be most accurately described as *falling into its effect*, or bursting into it gradually and blindly, with the weight of the oncoming change-stream behind it. It flops with a stagnant release, when sufficiently

pushed, into the neighbouring compartment, the next in temporal succession. . . .

This is philosophic discussion conducted by an artist whose hyperconsciousness of the Self makes him unusually aware of the *will* (to call it that) behind the gray doctrines he has made it his business to anatomize. *Time and Western Man*, by connecting the most recondite thought with the most banal events, provides every necessary key to the controlling sensibility of our age. "Each man is *every man*, an abstraction, not a *concrete person*." In book, film, and daydream, this is the age of History; and "the historical writer, in every case, is distracting people from a living Present (which becomes dead as the mind withdraws) into a Past into which they have gone to live." Having conjured up a vision of Mr. and Mrs. Citizen of the Future switching on a sound-film and living again "the sandwiches, the tea in the thermos, the ginger beer and mosquitoes, of a dozen years ago," Lewis comments that "People have already somewhat that sense of things laid out side by side, of the unreality of time, and yet of its paramount importance, that the conditions indicated above would breed." This is "the sleep of the machine"; when Professor Norbert Wiener in 1948 announced with some unction that the supersession of Man by Cybernetics was underwritten by the philosophy of Bergson, he was supplying an unconsciously Swiftian footnote to a neglected book then over twenty years old.

The Art of Being Ruled, though genetically the parent book, is most accessible today as a discursive appendix to the book about Time. It concentrates on the political consequences of the modish exaltation of unconsciousness and

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discontinuity. In *The Diabolical Principle*, ostensibly an attack on the magazine *Transition*, Lewis goes further. The fate-ridden, destiny-worshipping, dogmatically romantic Kreislers of the literary avant-garde exploit a *communizing* frame of mind to which they are prostituting whatever original talents they have been able to corral. With Joyce as impeccable executant and Gertrude Stein ("a whale out of water") as ponderous comic relief, Messrs. Jolas and Paul were busy, he believed, promoting the unconscious, the stream of consciousness, and the mongrelization of European languages, not, as they claimed, for highbrow amusement, but in the interest of an explicit political ideal. "Should *Transition* die tomorrow, there will in due course be another *Transition*, and another, until the Red sea is quite crossed."

Paleface links Sherwood Anderson's clumsy primitivism and D. H. Lawrence's visceral Dark Gods to the inferiority complex with which the conscious intelligence has been saddled. With Lawrence's account of Indians drumming—"There is no individual, isolated experience. . . . It is an experience of the blood-stream, not of the mind or spirit"—Lewis compares a paeon to the beauties of Bolshevism. "The Unconscious: The Feminine: The Communist; those are the main principles of action in the mind of Mr. Lawrence, linked in a hot and piping trinity of rough-stuff primitivism, and freudian hot-sex-stuff." ("Communism" is Lewis's label for a state of mind which may or may not be articulated as a political philosophy.) With this welter he links the cult of jazz and the considerable literature of the late 1920's exalting the Negro for the spontaneous, rhythmic "Dark Laughter" it ascribed

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to him. The romanticization of the black man and the brown man he represents as part of the campaign to undermine the intelligence by making the white man ashamed of possessing so trashy an engine of apprehension. *Paleface* was Lewis's first serious tactical error. Having, as he has since put it, "crashed headlong into a political racket" which exploits for irrelevant purposes the American Negro's very real miseries, he was widely represented as a jack-booted racist. "It was my design to attack the Paleface sentimentalising about the dark skin, and the mysterious dark soul within it (as if all souls were not mysterious), and *not* the Asiatic or the African. . . . Send a peon to Yale or Oxford (as an experiment, not because this would be good for him) and you would find out his abdomen was the same as anybody else's. But he was dear to the avantgardist. I had sinned."

As for *The Doom of Youth* and its satellite *The Old Gang and the New Gang*, they document the familiar case in another area. Among the many groups into which Lewis saw individuals being herded in order to discourage their individuality, age-groups seemed to him the most factitious and the most explicitly political; was not the 1930's the decade of "youth-movements"? Like all Lewis's polemics, this anatomy of "government by inferiority complexes" is elaborately documented, this time, since the "age-war" was being staged for lower-middlebrows, chiefly with newspaper cuttings: *Open the Door to Youth; Is Forty Frightening?*; *Mocking the Moderns; Over-Eating, the Vice of Middle Age* (Lewis captions this one "Bath-chair article for the Roaring Forties").

The system behind the Enemy's campaigns is simple;

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assuming the existence of a vast conspiracy embracing everything that was happening in the modern world, he dealt seriatim with its manifestations in order of decreasing complexity. *The Art of Being Ruled* explains in all its details the master strategy by which, in Lewis's view, modern man is being governed: philosophy, literature, popular entertainment and all the engines of publicity are being used to reduce any recalcitrant lumps of individuality and render the world a gray mass to be shaped by power. "There have never been so many people entirely ignorant of everything that is happening to them." The succeeding books survey phases of this silent revolution; first time-philosophy, the most highbrow; then Stein, Joyce, and avant-garde letters; then the more popular modernism of Lawrence and Anderson; lastly, the amiable dramas staged by the press for the hypnotized delectation of Mr. and Mrs. Everyman. The war was nearly lost by old generals, Everyman was being told; the peace was being gambled away by elderly politicians. (Mr. Eden's greatest political asset was his appearance of youth.) As for Everyman himself, he should be thankful, suffering as he does from prostate disorders, slowed reflexes, baldness, obesity, and obsolete patterns of thought, to draw his pension at forty and make way for a younger man. That eases the labor market too.

Now that we have achieved an alarmed consciousness of the adman, and can observe Mr. Gallup's reporters asking us how we choose to be exploited, it is difficult not to agree with nearly all of Lewis's particular diagnoses. It is more difficult to be satisfied about a conspiracy, since that involves knowing who the conspirators are. In *The*

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Doom of Youth, where he is dealing directly with the mechanisms governing the labor market, the standard of living, and the press, Lewis has little difficulty in establishing the Magnate as a personal devil. But though a Magnate might applaud an emotional equivalent of Bergson's philosophy if it were served up to him (of course, it is served up to him—for instance as Science Fiction), one has difficulty in imagining him presiding over the esoteric transformations described in *Time and Western Man*. In this difficulty Lewis has recourse to his old intuition that Hanp is a crowd.

"Big Business" does not depend upon the *personal* initiative, energy, and resource of a *single person*: it is a group-system: and to that extent, certainly, it is more "impersonal" than the old individualist industry.

By analogy, it is a "group-system" that is breaking down the West; Bergson and behaviorism, Dale Carnegie and the Carnegie Libraries, *The Times* and *Transition*, all lean in the same direction though their intercommunication is virtually nil.

A group-system breaks down the personality because it is itself impersonal: the reigning Arghol makes Hanp in his own image. This fact didn't of itself attract Lewis to personal rule, even though the aim of the Vortex was "to create individuals, wherever found." He called Mussolini "a noisy ice-cream agitator," and has repeatedly made it plain that he regards the tyrants of history, enclosed in their monotonous ritual of power, as pretty depressing. Shakespeare, he points out, wasn't interested in them until they had lost the capacity for action and belatedly

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turned into persons. Regarding rule as inevitable, he didn't before the late 1930's much care what form it took, nor did he imagine that the sensual average man much cared either, so long as he was permitted his illusion of freedom. He attacked the *Zeitgeist*, he said, only because "from the standpoint of genius" he regarded the transformation of the outside world into a vast Nursery as undesirable; it would leave the artist no place to go on taking his leave of "the most oppressive and stuffy features of the traditional Family Circle."¹

In 1930, however, the Nazis got under his guard. On a business visit to Berlin, which he found a "Hauptstadt of Vice, the excelsior Eldorado of a sexish bottom-wagging most arch old Nick, sunk within a costly and succulent rut," he was impressed by the Tarr-like professionalism of the Nazi party members, their aloofness from the Pervert's Paradise of *Berlin im Licht* whose boringly sensational iniquities are vividly surveyed in Part I of *Hitler*. The Nazi, he wrote, "is not a sex-moralist at all." He concentrates on issues of far more public moment:

The Bank is more important than the Backside. And the young Nationalsocialist has firmly grasped this fundamental truth, in a manner that no average political Anglo-Saxon would—who always

¹ This is from *The Doom of Youth*, which is addressed to a large public by hypothesis uninterested in the arts. To the different public of *Time and Western Man* he didn't conceal his distaste for a set of critical values that conspired to exalt every sort of painting and writing but that of Wyndham Lewis. Lewis never conceals his personal interests, but he presents different ones to different publics. This must never be forgotten in any attempt to reconcile his various statements of principle. On the other hand it must not be forgotten that he has always tended to believe in the exhaustiveness of what he was writing at the moment.

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allows his pocket to be picked provided you fix his attention on something that is "wicked" or naughty.

Even the Nazi substitution of race for class seemed to him on the whole an advantage. "Race is a more *inclusive* thing than Class." Class, he had noted in *The Art of Being Ruled*, was one of the prime techniques of *divide et impera*.

The more classes . . . that you can make him become regularly conscious of, the more you can control him, the more of an automaton he becomes. Thus, if a man can be made to feel himself acutely (a) an American, (b) a young American, (c) a middle-west young American, (d) a "radical and enlightened" middle-west young American, (e) a "college-educated," etc. etc., (f) a "college-educated" dentist who is an etc. etc., (g) a "college-educated" dentist of such-and-such a school of dentistry, etc. etc.,—the more inflexible each of these links is, the more powerful, naturally, is the chain. Or he can be locked into any of these compartments as though by magic by anyone understanding the wires. . . .

Hence his applause for a party that proposed one class (the "Aryan") to replace several dozen. The corollary anti-Semitism he dismissed as a mere *Agitationsmittel*. Remarking on this casualness nine years later, Lewis recalled that when he lived as a student in Munich about 1905 he "observed just as much anti-Semitism as is to be found there to-day." Hence "when I began to study Hitlerism I thought that Hitler was only going on about the Jews as Germans always had."

The apparent naivete of this must be weighed against Lewis's taste for system and his temperamental indifference to persons. The world he was observing, especially when it was characterized by political outlines on which his draughtsman's intelligence could seize, always seemed

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to him little more real than a Punch and Judy show. What he observed in Munich in 1905 impressed him—perhaps accurately—as a relatively harmless knockabout farce engaged in by people who on both sides had cheerfully turned themselves into racial stereotypes: no more sanguinary than Dr. Johnson's sparring with the Scots. In those days, and for thirty years thereafter, people susceptible to worry, pain, and frustration didn't exist in the universe to which his sensibility was attuned: Kreisler's miseries are comic, Bertha's those of a limp, persistent doll.

When late in the 1930's human beings entered Lewis's world, his lack of alarm at Hitler's sanguinary grimaces required a good deal of rationalizing. *The Hitler Cult* (1939) and its outrigger *The Jews, Are They Human?* modify the original *Hitler* (1931) very considerably. "Hitler as a political corrective and Hitler as Augustus are two different things. As the latter he is neither an attractive nor an impressive spectacle. . . ." This "politician with a Muse—and his Muse is Germania" seemed no longer in 1939 even a Lewisian Man from Nowhere but a time-bound archaism immersed in the *Mittelaltertum*, who did not need to "put the clock back" because for him it had never moved. "He is an emanation of the old many-schlossed, spiky, and bosky landscapes," himself "not quite real," his power belonging to the age of folklore and fable though energizing a dreary machine-age barbarism.

But while events were reconciling him to the unwisdom of presenting Hitler as even "a political corrective," Lewis made use of his temporary detachment to ridicule the

cant surrounding the aversion to Naziism that characterized British politics in the 1930's. In *Left Wings Over Europe* (1936) and *Count Your Dead—They Are Alive!* (1937) he described it as in part fostered, on allegedly humanitarian grounds, by "friends of the Soviet Union" whose humanitarianism was itself an *Agitationsmittel*, and who blandly ignored purges and slaughters conducted in their political homeland on a scale the Nazis hadn't then attempted to match. The Internationalists were brewing a war, and they didn't care what sentiments they exploited. In *The Jews, Are They Human?* (1939), the tone of which is a more valuable antiseptic to both anti-Semitism and its doctrinaire opposite than anything Lewis succeeds in saying, he suddenly deserts his role of dispassionate realist to cast in the teeth of indignant adversaries their indifference to the plight of the British workman:

For it is certain that no German or Pole could be more inhuman towards a Jew, than we are towards our aged poor, or towards the Englishman or Englishwoman who is down and out. Our "forgotten men" are worse pariahs than any Jew is in a Central European city. We have our Ghettos too. Our Ghettos are our *slums*. That is what we call our Ghettos. But in our Ghettos we herd and starve *our own people*. That is the difference.

Though this doesn't negate Lewis's own earlier indifference, it suggests that the hands of his accusers have been far from clean. The pogroms have made it easy to misrepresent his book, composed in a time when there seemed so little reason to suppose that the Nazis would ever shed any blood that the British press treated them as a joke. In *Hitler* Lewis was certainly not advocating either

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anti-Semitism or a British Fuehrer. He was simply not scandalized by such possibilities, as (regarding power as inescapable) he has never been scandalized by any relatively bloodless manifestation of power. He understood the folly of not taking Hitler seriously and the folly of pretending that Germany could be indefinitely prevented from having a significant national existence. He also found something temperamentally congenial in "these bitter interpretations of current history," and was thoroughly aware of the mirror-tricks of the economic Wonderland, with its war debts, loan capital, crop-burning, and starvation amid plenty, from which the Nazis proposed to dissociate their country. But he was surrounded by people who, not having mastered *The Art of Being Ruled*, imagined that they themselves existed in supernal freedom while a tyrant threatened to grind their German cousins beneath his heel. Though his books in the 1920's had gotten sensationally good reviews, Lewis's reputation underwent in 1931 an occultation from which it has never recovered. His books stopped being reviewed at all, and it was arranged that his best novel should suffocate unnoticed in England and go unpublished in the United States for fifteen years.

The Hitler book, incidentally, displeased both Hitler and Goebbels. As soon as they came to power the German translation was pulped.

PART IV AUTOMATA

The ossature is my favorite part of a living animal organism, not its intestines.

—*Men Without Art*

1. BESTRE

IT WAS, THOUGH EXPLICABLE, CHARACTERISTIC THAT LEWIS should commit himself to the embarrassingly bad guess that Hitler was "a man of peace." His polemic writings, he has often said, are concerned not with people but with principles. So he has always tended to *create* the people he is writing about by linking into some plausible mechanism the principles observable in their vicinity. He was more interestingly wrong, though wrong to the same degree, about Joyce and Pound in *Time and Western Man*. Yet his account of the movement by which he observed these men of letters to be surrounded remains useful after twenty-five years. Movements are mechanisms, and Lewis is at home with those. You can also regard most people as mechanisms, if you confine acquaintance with them to observation of the sort Lewis exercised, in sun-baked torpor, on the Breton coast. If you are in quest of characters and situations for comic fiction, the problem that nettled the creator of Tarr and Cantelman—what sort of

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human reality underlies these gesticulations?—can be safely ignored.

The polemics exalt a rhetorical kind of knowing over a grasp, in depth, of what is there to know. Enough of the world can be dealt with by this willed superimposition of coordinates to make the polemics useful and plausible over most of their area; but their insuperable logic, like that of Mercator's Projection, is increasingly strained on each side of the narrow line where coincidence between map and object is absolute, and achieves infinite distortion at the poles. The same is true of Lewis's fiction of the years 1927–32, which was written at the same time as the major polemics and according to the same principles.

Though they were formulated about 1927, the principles go back to the Breton summers of twenty years earlier. Since people, as he remarked much later, "seem to me to be rather walking notions than 'real' entities," it is, he considers, a mistake to imagine that one is getting closer to them, or tapping any meaningful reality, in participating in their sensuous *Gemütlichkeit*. One must retain one's aloofness from the hot time-world of the senses. The essay that prefaced the 1909 account of "Bestre" in the *English Review* describes the sort of abstractness he has continued to prefer in his dealings with other people:

So man has developed a kind of abstract factor in his mind and self, a social nature that is the equivalent of money, a kind of conventional, nondescript and mongrel energy, that can at any moment be launched toward a friend. . . . This artificial and characterless go-between . . . keeps the man's individual nature all the more inviolable and unmodified.

This energy ripens his friends, and he bestows it upon them "because the richer these friends be, spiritually or materially, according to the desire of the person, the more he feels his own love and power." The friends, one notes, aren't credited with anything of their own. In living, as on canvas, the Self seeks to create about it that "universe for one organism" posited in "Inferior Religions" as the objective of art. When we come at last to Bestre himself we find that the abstractness of his relations with other people is hostile, not benevolent. No matter: it still serves the function of making him feel his own self-love and power.

Bestre, as we have seen, was converted thirteen years later into a Tyro, or Elemental Person, to be presented in a sort of explosion that is at once satire, picture, and story. Personal energy, that is to say, takes the place of plot. Unfortunately the 1922 rewriting of the story proceeds, with a certain element of bluff, as though a plot were present.

The rewritten "Bestre" (published in the second number of *The Tyro* and reprinted, with minor additions, in *The Wild Body*) is one of the most curious documents in the Lewis canon. More contradictions come to the surface there than anywhere else. We have remarked that the subject—Bestre's technique for aggrandizing his person and activities—had a compulsive fascination for the Ur-Lewis, and that the prose he at length invented to reproduce this process generated dreams and manifestoes enough to keep it occupied for some years. When the instrument was at last applied to its original subject, the result wasn't a triumph but an arresting artistic disaster.

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Vorticist prose (not the thick sensual medium of *Tarr* and "Cantelman") has a certain spontaneous innocence when it is dreaming or declaiming; but when it engages at length with an allegedly "real" world, Arghol's "souillure" corrupts every gesture. Lewis the Vorticist was in a way better off when he acted as if the world didn't exist; the showiness possible within that circumscription remained compatible with honesty.

The emphasis in the new version of "Bestre" is on the way this Breton innkeeper feuds with people by looking at them; his weapon is the Eye. He is simply the artist inverted—or perhaps not inverted.

He has the anatomical instinct of the hymenopter for his prey's most morbid spot; for an old wound; for a lurking vanity. He goes into the other's eye, seeks it, and strikes. On a physical blemish he turns a scornful and careless rain like a garden hose. If the deep vanity is on the wearer's back, or in his walk or gaze, he sluices it with an abundance you would not expect his small eyes to be capable of delivering.

While Bestre is busy waging with hectic gusto his petty wars (one of his victims emits "the rash grating philippic of a battered cat, limping to safety"), the Lewis prose is performing its most spectacular harlequinades—

With a flexible imbrication reminiscent of a shutter-lipped ape, a bud of tongue still showing, he shot the latch of his upper lip down in front of the nether one. . . .

. . . his tufted vertex charging about the plank ceiling,—generally ricocheting like a dripping sturgeon in a boat's bottom—arms warm brown, ju-jitsu of his guts, tan canvas shoes and trousers rippling in ribbed planes as he darted about—with a filthy snicker for the scuttling female, and a stark cock of the eye for an unknown figure miles to his right: he filled this short tunnel with clever

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parabolas and vertices, neat little stutterings of triumph, goggle-eyed hypnotisms, in retrospect, for his hearers. . . .

This rush of imagery makes it hard to notice that we are not in the presence of something very important indeed. It also tends to conceal the narrator Ker-Orr's self-revelation:

I learnt a great deal from Bestre. He is one of my masters. When the moment came for me to discover myself—a thing I believe few people have done so thoroughly, so early in life and so quickly—I recognized more and more the beauty of Bestre.

This afterthought—it is in *The Wild Body* but not in *The Tyro*—affirms what in the 1909 version was no more than a question about the suitability of Bestre as an artist's paradigm: "Has Bestre discovered the only type of action compatible with artistic creation?" When we put beside it two more paragraphs about the fanatical Breton we suddenly possess the key to the bewildering energy of the prose:

When discovered in the thick of one of his dumb battles, he has the air of a fine company promoter, concerned, trying to corrupt some sombre fact into shielding for an hour his unwieldy fiction, until some fresh wrangle can retrieve it. . . .

He is looking at reality with a professional eye, so to speak: with a professional liar's. I have observed that the more cramped and meagre his action has been, the more exuberant his account of the affair is afterwards.

The moment, having glimpsed this tipped hand, we begin to suspect that Ker-Orr's own narrative frenzy covers "cramped and meagre" adventures inadequate to the importance the prose bestows on them, his final comment on Bestre takes on new meaning:

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Then he has the common impulse to avenge that self that has been perishing under the knout of a bad reality, by glorifying and surfeiting it on its return to the imagination.

There is a very thin line, in short, between creating that beauty which is "an icy douche of ease and happiness at something suggesting perfect conditions for an organism"—the symmetrical gushing of water, or red rain on the shadowed sides of heads—and *using* things, rather than *knowing* them, to surfeit the abused self. It is the thin line between God and his Apes, and Lewis takes so little pains to dissociate himself from Ker-Orr throughout *The Wild Body*, that we may fairly deduce that he himself found it easy to confuse the Vorticist's still point of maximum energy with a hectic random fusillade of images to aggrandize the trivial or nonexistent. Ker-Orr's prose exists, in its tumbled way; but the man Bestre need never have existed.

When you are creating your own world your will must proceed without criteria. The *Blast* manifestoes are gay, and *The Enemy of the Stars* has a solemn enough Nietzschean logic, but the puppet-fiction of fifteen years later—*The Wild Body*, *The Childermass*, *The Apes of God*, and *Snooty Baronet*—is loosely brilliant and replete with snags unforeseen in the days of the easy Hanp-Arghol schema. And in the late twenties and thirties we find Lewis operating under a perpetual compulsion to retrieve his past work from oblivion for the purpose of projecting his current complexities into it. The stories of 1909 and 1917 were heavily reworked in 1927; *The Enemy of the Stars* was issued in a luxurious, elaborate, but much less intelligible form in 1932; the *Blast* manifestoes were de-

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ceptively revised for inclusion in *Wyndham Lewis the Artist* in 1939; and what is offered in *Blasting and Bombardiering* (1937) as "first-hand impressions of the opening stages of a great war," "written *on the spot*," and now quoted, for historic value, from *Blast*, has actually been almost unrecognizably rewritten from beginning to end.

In none of these reprints except that of *Tarr* in 1928 is there any adequate indication of the amount of reworking that has been done. And in no case, not even that of *Tarr*, is the revision, except in detail, an improvement. The war with Time was involving Lewis in a good many pyrrhic compromises, masked by greater and greater brilliance of language. It is a fair guess that the past of the *Blast* days seemed to him in retrospect "cramped and meagre" and in need, on Bestre's principle, of more exuberant rendering.

The new technical principle is the fabrication of a world, hardly more than word-deep, by a species of verbal impasto. A thick uneven pigment of words is dashed onto the page. What is happening is that Lewis is elevating his vices into a style. He has always been prone to the fear that his people would slip away unless battered against the wall occasionally by a stream of vocables; as far back as *Tarr* one finds the thinly painted glazed surface of the staple narrative broken by lumpier patches. As the pupil of a Van Gogh eye is rendered not as a spot but as "a nest of concentric wedges of greens, reds, blues and yellows with their apex inward," so the figure of Anastasya is an organization of gongs, bubbles, apes, eggs, tobacco, jewelry and hot water:

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When she laughed, this commotion was transmitted to her body as though sharp, sonorous blows had been struck on her mouth. Her lips were long hard bubbles risen in the blond heavy pool of her face, ready to break, pitifully and gaily. Grown forward with ape-like intensity, they refused no emotion noisy egress if it got so far. Her eyes were large, stubborn and reflective, brown coming out of blondness. Her head was like a deep white egg in a tobacco-coloured nest. She exuded personality with alarming and disgusting intensity. It was an ostentation similar to diamonds and gold watch-chains. Kreisler felt himself in the midst of a cascade, a hot cascade.

This is done with nearly Teutonic deliberateness; in later books these highly original mechanisms of presentation are lightened and speeded up. Simultaneously, the subject matter gives up weight and grows more abstract and trivial. In *Tarr*, though the cogs slip frequently, a considerable mass of reality is being maneuvered: the lethal romance of Herr Kreisler's ponderous clockwork dive into annihilation is a subject of some substance. By *Snooty Baronet* the style has reached its most impressive efflorescence, and the matter (a joint parody of D. H. and T. E. Lawrence) a fragmented nullity that doesn't redeem some very lively pages. A brilliant array of techniques for articulating the carapaces of the unreal may be observed in Lewis's middle period in pursuit of a subject to complement its own vitality. *The Apes of God* attempted to assimilate the multiple but, as it proved, too trivial unrealities of Bloomsbury. *The Childermass* attempted to do without a "real" world altogether and let the vision articulate itself. The 1927 revision of the early *Wild Body* stories compounds disaster. This decade saw the squandering of an unprecedented talent. Two sentences from *The Childer-*

mass sum it up: "It is not people that interest me so much as the principles that determine their actions," and "I like to see a few corpses about, it makes the others seem almost alive."

2. ROBOTS

KER-ORR WROTE IN 1927 THAT HE HAD LEARNED MUCH FROM Bestre; in the same year Lewis launched a new magazine with a new persona: no longer Arghol but The Enemy. The Enemy's polemics against behaviorists, squeakdolls and Time-puppets develop side by side with a new theory of satiric art which greatly extends and largely supercedes the *Blast* manifestoes. Its principle is simple: *Hanp always desires to mechanize himself*. Being unreal, he seeks the articulation of the machine. What Hanp is doing is imitating the elect who gather their energies into the invisible Present, between Past and Future and outside of Time. Crowd-men, however, possess a pseudo-reality only in the past, where memory gathers innumerable successive moments into a simulacrum of permanence, or in the Future of their irresponsible dreams. "All men, in the matter of their past, are little immortals. It is not an 'immortality' to be very puffed up about, it is true." So when they attempt to *be* something, they "are" their past, gathered into mechanism and endlessly repeated. They "are" what they have learned to do, like Pavlov's dogs.

That is why Bestre, Brotcotnaz, and the other "Tyros" in *The Wild Body* behave so uncommonly like Lewis's stalking-horse Ker-Orr. On the other hand, the reason

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why Ker-Orr behaves so uncommonly like them is that he also possesses a machine, called the Wild Body. He "hangs in its midst, operating it with detachment." The only difference is that they *are* machines, whereas he *operates* one. Hence the dichotomy announced in 1927. On the one hand, "Laughter is the Wild Body's song of triumph"; on the other, "The root of the Comic is to be sought in the sensations resulting from the observation of a *thing* behaving like a person."

These principles go back to the first appearance of the "Inferior Religions" essay in the *Little Review* in 1917, and in fact are based on the distinction, adumbrated in *Blast* three years before that, between the Self which alone is real, and the Not-self's Things that swim in Time. In an expanded version of "Inferior Religions," in the 1927 *Wild Body* volume, Lewis fully explained the method he was about to apply in fiction and polemic.

The wheel at Carisbrooke imposes a set of movements upon the donkey inside it, in drawing water from the well, that is easy to grasp. But in the case of a hotel or fishing-boat, for instance, the complexity of the rhythmic scheme is so great that it passes as open and untrammelled life. This subtle and wider mechanism merges, for the spectator, in the general variety of nature. Yet we have in most lives the spectacle of a pattern as circumscribed and complete as a theorem of Euclid.

Such characters are "not creations but puppets. . . . They transcend life and are complete cyphers. . . . A comic type is a failure of a considerable energy, an imitation and standardizing of self, suggesting the existence of a uniform humanity. . . ."

The corollary of this is that the whole of Lewis's art

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has now broken with time. Hanp's "Life" and "Nature" are no longer an ambient welter: they are gathered up into mechanism, on the principle that whatever inhabits Time moves in the grip of Causality. A machine is static: its motions are all implied in its structure, and you can figure them out by inspecting it in repose. The statically busy hotel-worlds of *The Wild Body*, with their elaborate compulsive rhythms, are "little monuments of logic." They are comic because essentially trivial. So are their inhabitants. The overture to *The Apes of God* is his first extended exercise in the game of presenting people as comic mechanisms—

She lowered her body into its appointed cavity, in the theatrical illumination, ounce by ounce—back first, grappled to Bridget, bulldog grit all-out—at last riveted as though by suction within its elastic crater, corseted by its mattresses of silk from waist to bottom, one large feeble arm riding the billows of its substantial fluted brim. . . . A strong wheezing sigh, as the new air went in and the foul air went out, and then she realized the tones of a muted fog-horn to exclaim—

"There will come a time Bridget when I shall not be able to move about like that!"

Snooty Baronet is much slicker:

When I look at Humph's chin I am reminded of a strongbox. The chap is all chin. I hate this face more than I hate my own, which is saying a good deal. I disliked it from the start, a long time ago.

As a box, supposing the thing were that, it would as a matter of course be fitted with a false bottom. It is not a straightforward chin. If you opened it up (touching a spring, and removing the lower jaw, with its snow-white, well-stocked dentistry and well-upholstered coral gums) you would detect that the spacious cavity did not represent *all* of the chin. The box would not be as deep as you had

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expected, that is not quite so deep. There would be a half-inch of draughtage missing, to be accounted for somehow. The hollow would be shortweight. . . .

Humph and the matriarch whose body, supported by Bridget, toddles from chair to chair are precisely Apes of Arghol, because in turning into machines they have deprived themselves of history and future alike. They differ from the artist outside of Time only in not accomplishing anything. They have transformed "life" into something less restless and flamelike, without making it into Art. They are living still lifes: in the expressive French phrase, *natures mortes*.

The liaison between the puppet-fiction and the polemics is easy to discern. These people incarnate the ideas the polemics are directed against. The unfinished *Childermass* (1928) is simply *The Art of Being Ruled* dramatized. The scene is a plain outside heaven, where earth's deceased, equipped by the celestial quartermaster with symbolic outfits, are interrogated prior to annihilation or admission to the "magnetic city." Their interrogator, the Bailiff, a supernaturally articulate Bestre, is the incarnate *Zeitgeist*, deputy of space-time. Hunch-backed and paunched, "a dark-robed polichinelle," this hysterical functionary grimaces from his "lofty tapering Punch-and-Judy theatre" with the loquacious brutality of the traditional Punch, bringing to magnetic apotheosis Lewis's conception of a Tyro or Elemental Person, a puppet worked by deft fingers with a screaming voice underneath. A rebel spirit named Macrob accuses him accurately of regarding human life "as a term, the crystallization of a personality, which, once it has *become*, cannot ever exist. Posthumously, you

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bake that into the displeasing forms we see around us." The Bailiff with leering sanctimoniousness agrees: Macrobian, according to the doctrines it is the Bailiff's business to interpret, has never had any personal existence. "There is no *you* apart from what you perceive."

You persisted for a certain number of years like a stammer. You were a *stammer*, if you like, of Space-Time. She . . . began saying "Macrobian" and she went on stammering "Macrobian" in a continuous present for the period of your natural life. The present "*you*" is the echo of that strange event.

He expatiates with a time-philosopher's sardonic gusto on the paltriness of this nonpersonal existence:

So instead of happening once and for all sharp and sweet you meandered and rattled on through what must have seemed to you a never-ending lifetime, through countless numbers of stupid events "*you*" were dragged by slow heavily-moving Space-Time. . . . There was all the filling-up and evacuating of your stupid body, was there not?—all the places that had to be built to house it, chairs for it to sit on, other animals to be killed, vegetables to be grown, collected, bought and sold, multitudes of things to be cooked, plates to be kept clean, clothes you had soiled to be washed, all on account of "*you*." And so with millions like you. . . .

The Bailiff is the menacing *will* behind the time-doctrines anatomized in *Time and Western Man*. Language for him is behavior, nothing more:

Come now and I'll show you how it is that the words get melted, in gland-mud washing of de Swanee-bottom. I'll explain the last, that's the mud-flats where the dark words are dancing—I can't show them you—they get swamped.

He carries on for six pages in an unctuous parody of the later Joyce (*The Diabolical Principle*). He displays, with

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the help of a flashlight, his "dark within" ("only his outside's dirty Paleface"). He treats humanity as a nursery of "promising" babies (*The Doom of Youth*). At one point, incarnation of sodden Romance,

He rocks himself crooning upon the ledge Punch-hugging the truncheon, affecting to play for time. In the middle of his crooning he swiftly gabbles:

BAILIFF. "Dat's my oozy swatch-cove patter!"

TWO BAILIFFITES. { "Is dat your swatch-cove patter?"
"Say, is dat your swatch-cove patter?"

Against this protean figure, a sort of Kreisler whom Wyndham Lewis in a few private sessions has equipped, to his swinish delight, with metaphysical sanctions for his clock-ridden nihilism, are ranged the Hyperideans, whose spokesmen in tumbling set-speeches anatomize with forensic hostility the cult of homosexuality, the dismemberment of the person, the apotheosis of the child, and the other themes of *The Art of Being Ruled*. The fragment ends with the Bailiff on the defensive, himself about to be interrogated by these Lewisian insurgents.

The Bailiff is an astonishing creation with his cataracts of tainted energy, but the marvelous verbal inventiveness of *The Childermass* doesn't compensate for a certain tedium consequent on the replacement of persons by dialectical puppets. *The Apes of God*, on the other hand, has specific human targets. Its subject is triviality masquerading as significant existence. Its people, the Bailiff's parishioners, are examined in detail as Space-Time drags them through Macrob's lifetime of stupid events, shuffling

their hands and feet and filling up and evacuating their silly bodies. Lewis, we find, shares more than he likes to reveal of the Bailiff's appetite for such triviality. The 1930 edition of the book, prepared under his supervision, was limited to 750 copies—just enough to saturate Bloomsbury—and like the first number of *Blast* has the proportions of an artillery missile. It is nearly three inches thick and weighs just five pounds: uncomfortably bulky either for carrying home or for reading by gloating Apes seeking to recognize their friends in the pillory.

This pantheon of arty frauds is surveyed in the book by an immense Irish moron with sore feet, allegedly a genius ("of course as yet he is too young to have done much, but he has written one most lovely poem"), fretting beneath the tutelage of the genius-specialist Horace Zagreus. Zagreus, a white-maned homosexual, is treating his pupil to a Grand Tour of the London Ape-world. The casual eye is unlikely to distinguish Zagreus from Wyndham Lewis, whose knowingness he for his part apes very carefully. Zagreus, as a matter of fact, is completely sterile. He acts only on instructions from the omniscient Pierpoint, a Lewis-avatar whom everyone fears and defers to though he never puts in a personal appearance. In prolongation of the analogy between Lewis/Shakespeare and the provincial hangman, Pierpoint bears the name of the British executioner, twentieth-century avatar of Bailiff/Punch's would-be nemesis Jack Ketch. In the person of Vincent Penhale he will himself, like Punch's hangman, eventually be hanged; but in 1930 *The Vulgar Streak* is still eleven years away, and Pierpoint is engaged in schooling deputies for a dozen campaigns that don't as yet seem hopeless.

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The Encyclical on Apery which Zagreus puts into his protégé's hands was written by Pierpoint; his monologue on satire (chapter ix) reproduces exactly a declamation of Pierpoint's; having scored a point he whispers to the awe-stricken Dan, "I was using Pierpoint's methods. *Those were the methods of Pierpoint!* That is how he would have met that argument!" Of a social gathering of Apes, he pontificates,

. . . They are neither flesh nor fowl—they are *fictional mongrel facts* (that is Pierpoint's expression). . . . There, in front of us, they sit in two rows (we are in one)—*the people who have never been able to become Fiction*. How portentously they suffer for the want of a great artist to effect that immortal translation—how they suffer! So they cannot exactly be blamed for their attempt at self-creation.—One of these fine days a *real* creator will come along. What a sigh of utter relief there will be—when the Ape can cease from Aping, and the sham-artist lay down his pen and brush and be at rest!

The wonderful local brilliance of presentation dissuades us from wondering why Pierpoint/Lewis has chosen to spend so much time talking to frauds like Zagreus and Lionel Kein. The parallel with "Bestre" is suggestive: like Ker-Orr, Pierpoint would seem to be a carefully camouflaged indulgence of the author's. Ker-Orr is faking, and we are meant not to notice. Pierpoint's superiority to the Apes is also a fako, and we are meant not to notice that. We are discouraged from thinking of either of these mouthpieces as characters *in* the work. They are the only people at whom the author never looks. Their "detachment," we notice once *we* start looking at them, is wholly spurious. Ker-Orr reading Berkeley, or prowling from window to window spying on Bestre's wars, is himself a

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puppet whom Lewis blandly chooses to treat as a "soldier of humour." Pierpoint instructing Zagreus on the techniques for initiating the hopeless "genius" Dan into the Higher Apéry is wasting as much time and ingenuity as any of the Apes.

3. EYE AND EAR

THIS VAST GRAND TOUR OF BLOOMSBURY IS IN A DOZEN WAYS a tour de force. Mannerisms of idiot speech have never been caught with more startling convincingness:

"But I caant Mrs. Lochore I wish I could!" Joo's plaintive rusty pipe exploded. "I *caant* Mrs. Lochore stop in!"

The omitted comma is a simple device, but the rhythms it can convey in Lewis's hands are absolute and inimitable. The stichometric dialogue at the Lenten Party looks equally like transcription and is equally a creative fiat:

"I don't believe it's a storm Osmund!" she panted stormily, short of wind.

"Not a *storm* Sib!"

"Not exactly a storm!" breathed the blanched Sib.

"I wonder whatever it can be then" Osmund asked anxiously, "if it is not a storm! That would be most uncanny, if it were not a storm!"

The Sib leant towards him a little, and she said in a more muffled pant:

"I believe it's the loud-speaker!"

"Sib thinks it's the loud-speaker!" Lord Osmund immediately called down the table, beckoning to Lord Phoebus. "Yes Sib believes it is not a storm at all—she believes it is the loudspeaker Phoebus!"

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It is with his ear, oddly enough, that Lewis has composed the best parts of the book. By some strange self-deception, he immediately convinced himself that he did it with his eye. "No book has ever been written," he later proclaimed, "that has paid more attention to the *outside* of people. In it their shells or pelts, or the language of their bodily movements, come first, not last." Yet probably half the text is dialogue, and half the remainder is transacted inside the characters' heads, a method that Lewis has always noisily disowned.

The novelist's eye, it is true, dominates the first chapter, in which the ebullient Dick crashes good-naturedly about his aged aunt's apartment:

His hands knotted, presented symmetrically like buffers in the pockets of the soiled mauve bags—face inclined to the ground—the bright essence, regardless-of-cost, left burning in his staring head-lights—the spacious involuntary tonsure now visible as he slightly rolled forward his head, the good Dick paced away from her, faced unstably about and returned—with the action of the refractory child being dragged along by something like its umbilical cord, while mischievously but indolently it kicks objects in its path, to obstruct highhanded Nanny's dragging.

This owes less to observation than it seems to. From the hail of vocables we can extract a prodigal locomotive, a reluctant monk, and a surrealist infant, but only a hazy impression of Dick's appearance. The images fight for predominance. The syntax is rudimentary, subordinating nothing. And though the images are visual, they are gummed onto a subject itself visible in such a way as to conceal its shape completely. The effectiveness of the paragraph is kinesthetic; the words don't matter so much

as the abrupt gestures of their consonants and phrasal intervals. This passage is static in the same way as the story "Bestre" is static; the details fall in a steady rain, and any of them may alight on any spot. Mistaking the image for the thing, Lewis tends also to mistake the characters for the novel; like *The Wild Body*, the *Apes* breaks apart in the memory into lengthy character sketches, loosely united by the author's prickly vigor.

There is no necessary connection between doctrinaire concern with the *outside* of people and absence of plot. Lewis seems to have mistaken the direction of a dictum of Tarr's. "Deadness," Tarr told Anastasya, "is the first condition of art":

A hippopotamus' armoured hide, a turtle's shell, feathers or machinery on the one hand; *that* opposed to naked pulsing and moving of the soft inside of life, along with infinite elasticity and consciousness of movement, on the other. . . . The lines and masses of the statue are its soul. No restless, quick flame-like ego is imagined for the *inside* of it. That is another condition of art; *to have no inside*, nothing you cannot *see*. Instead, then, of being something impelled like an independent machine by a little egotistic fire inside, it lives soullessly and dead by its frontal lines and masses.

Tarr was explaining how Art is opposed to "Life," the novelist's material. "All *action* revolves around death, and reality is entirely founded on it." Thus, since "life" is constantly moving—moving toward death—the ambition of art (which does not court extinction) is to be perfectly static and unyielding, as though it had always existed.

This leads directly to the "Saltimbanques" plot of Lewis's invariable predilection. This plot, like the story of Kreisler, plunges toward Death. The significant action

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which winds up *Tarr*, *The Revenge for Love*, and *The Vulgar Streak* is a break through the plot machinery into the Universe of Absence performed by someone who in so doing breaks out of the Time-bound world of behaviorist puppetry into a moral world. Or rather—"moral" is misleading—into a world in which people can exist by acting violently enough. As Arghol saw long ago, the only significant action in such a world is annihilation—preferably of the Self.

In *The Wild Body*, *The Childermass*, and *The Apes of God*, however, this plot is ignored, and the gravamen of Tarr's preference for an art with no mysterious insides is transferred from structure to texture and made to buttress Lewis's campaign against the fluid and unconscious. Conventional writing and painting, he thought, depended too much on life's accidental postures—hence his distaste for the "period" material in *Ulysses*—or else it sought to infuse, by way of the stream of consciousness, a spurious vivacity into its very manner of seeing. Specifically, he attacked the post-Joycean Interior Monologue:

A tumultuous stream of evocative, spell-bearing vocables, launched at your head—or poured into your Unconscious—is, finally, a dope only. It may be an auriferous mud, but it must remain mud—not a clear but a murky picture. As a literary medium it is barbaric.

The antithesis his practice provides for the method of incantation is less radical than his commentaries make it sound. It would be difficult to show that there is less visual material in *Ulysses* than in the *Apes*, or that Lewis's vocables aren't tumultuous, evocative, or spell-bearing. He doesn't even trample down the sounds of words: the "in-

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sane see-saw" of the ass's bray in *The Childermass* isn't visual but entirely onomatopoeic, and New York's "shabby baskers saluting the sun with many a caustic blink" (*America, I Presume*) are fixed to the page by a pattern of k's and flat a's. Lewis alters the Joycean practice in two ways only: he replaces the suave by the spasmodic rhythm, and he multiplies around the static object images drawn from the visual memory, often to the occultation of the object itself. Hence the paradox of his show of concern for the appearance of things, and his busy obliteration of that appearance.

The eye of the author of *The Apes of God* seems fixed less on the material beneath his ostensible scrutiny than on a placarded determination not to write like Joyce. Hence a curious compounding of Lewis's long-standing notion that his aesthetic effects are the result of conscious process. The vices that were coerced into a style in "Bestre" and *The Childermass* fly in the *Apes*, under the pressure of a still greater ambition, into dazzling and memorable chaos. The book remains, as he said of *Ulysses*, "eternally cathartic, a monument."

Though the language is more deliberate than that of *Tarr*, the book's best effects are once more intrinsically linguistic, yet peripheral to deliberation. Time and again the brilliant accumulations of words yield glimpses of the novel Wyndham Lewis never wrote—a tragic phantasmagoria in which Pierpoint and the Apes, Tarr and Kreisler, the genius and the mortal instruments, are trapped alike: walking a treadmill of unreason amid the blinking, after a plan just too vast to comprehend, of a million meaningless lights.

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4. DEATH AND THE HATTER'S DUMMY

MUCH OF THE TENSION OF THESE BOOKS WAS AFFORDED BY a latent contradiction that finally reached the snapping-point. *Time and Western Man* had argued that the behaviorist, in reducing the person to a set of predictable gestures, was insulting the human race. In the same year Lewis was producing a body of fiction on the premise that people were nothing else. This fiction started by being satire, employing the strategy of appearing to know no more about the characters than a set of behaviorist's Tests would reveal. Lewis gradually came to doubt if there were in fact any more to know, and forgetting the concealed "bitter ferment" he had postulated beneath the froth-forms in "Inferior Religions," came to accept the satiric premises as truth. The only person the behaviorist had insulted, it appears, was Wyndham Lewis. In *Snooty Baronet*, the last automaton novel, the author's persona and first-person narrator becomes, with only partial irony, an avowed behaviorist doing field work.

This makes Death, Tarr's absolute, a considerable puzzle, neither transition nor apotheosis. Nor can the man at war with Time regard it as a termination, for that is to define it in terms of process. If life consists of irrelevant discrete acts, like pennies laid on the pavement, what special significance has the last one? Hanp had felt kindly toward the dead Arghol because Arghol dead was reduced to Hanp's preferred element: "There was only flesh there,

and all our flesh is the same. Something distant, terrible and eccentric, bathing in that milky snore, had been struck and banished from matter." There is no pathos in the corpse, because pathos focuses two emotions that function only in time: regret, and apprehension. The universe has altered, however: "The night was suddenly absurdly peaceful, trying richly to please him with gracious movements of trees, and gay processions of arctic clouds. Relief of grateful universe." The emphasis is not on the termination of Arghol's career, nor on whatever new state he may be conceived to have entered; it is on the feel of the world with one element subtracted.

In *Snooty Baronet*, Kell-Imrie examines his feelings about the dead McPhail: can one go on treating this "dweller in the universe of Absence" as though he were permanently settled in a distant country? . . .

Frankly I think not . . . I actually find, upon examining it, that I *do not like Rob so well* as when he was not dead. Is it possible to dislike the dead, because they are dead? I think so. Therefore I will say "I *liked* Rob McPhail." I do not like him quite so much now, because he is dead.—There is nothing more to like! After all, I could not *marry* a dead person! So how could I *like* one, really? But once I *liked* him very much. That certainly is beyond question. To me that is valueless. But it is *true*.

About death *qua* death Lewis is as blank as anyone else. What has slipped in to animate the first passage is Hanp's relief, and what enlivens the second is Snooty's irritation because one who was, so to speak, a creature of his has now passed beyond his power. Hanp's relief was a less inhuman emotion. The "universe of Absence" is a hole carved out of Snooty's sphere of influence. Furthermore,

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the real McPhail belongs to the Past, where Snooty represents being dragged. He is a behaviorist, for whom nothing has connected meaning. Sexual relations mean less to him than they did for Tarr or Cantelman, who at least possessed appetites. Snooty's mechanical leg responds to the lissom Val with more *éclat* than he:

She grappled with me at once, before the words were well out of my mouth, with the self-conscious gusto of a Chatterly-taught expert. But as I spoke I went to meet her—as I started my mechanical leg giving out an ominous creak (I had omitted to oil it, like watches and clocks these things require lubrication). I seized her stiffly round the body. All of her passably lissom person—on the slight side—gave. It was the human willow, more or less. It fled into the hard argument of my muscular pressures. Her waist broke off and vanished into me as I took her over in waspish segments, an upper and a nether. The bosoms and head settled like a trio of hefty birds upon the upper slope of my militant trunk: a headless nautilus on the other hand settled upon my middle, and attacked my hams with its horrid tentacles—I could feel the monster of the slimy submarine-bottoms grinding away beneath, headless and ravenous.

The coldness with which Lewis invests this perfunctory love-making is a technical feat—the prose is under better control than anything in the *Apes*—but what this passage might lead us to expect is what we in fact get—a peppy and pointless novel.

The action in fact is that of *Tarr* over again, projected into Evelyn Waugh's London instead of du Maurier's Paris, and with mechanism briskly substituted for the sensuous dream. It seems pointless despite the author's resourceful clowning because Kreisler's human weight has been withdrawn; though there are two violent deaths instead of one, one in the bull-ring and one in Persia, the systematic

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canceling of romantic clichés leaves the bullfighter Rob McPhail (a skit on Roy Campbell) and the impresario Humph to be casually junked like a couple of unwanted Fords instead of crashing with the suicidal Teuton's massiveness.

Kreisler devalued, we are left with Tarr; and however hard Lewis agitates Snooty, the old problem remains: the detached man's mental activity doesn't replace his lack of substance. He outdoes Tarr in detachment. He is more diffident towards Val ("My God I had forgotten. I suppose I have to describe her for you. That is a bore.") than Tarr dreamed of being towards Bertha, and more anxious to disengage himself from a relationship with her still more callously sustained. His other love, Lily, "my favorite piece of nudity," exudes none of the false symbolism of Anastasya's anatomical floridity. The real weakness in the conception of Tarr was that his interest in Anastasya seemed out of keeping with his cult of detachment. The rhetoric about mating a complementary perfection jarred against actions too ordinary to imply supranormal motivations:

He felt as though he were embracing a tiger, who was not unsympathetic, but rather surprised. Perhaps he had been too sudden. He ran his hand upwards along her body. All was statuesquely genuine. She took his hand away.

But no one can complain that Snooty's admirably disciplined connoisseurship has backstage dealings with penny-dreadfulese:

My eye was flashing about all over her and then sweeping off into the apartment and swooping back top-speed, to dash itself

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against a cliff of peach-lit marble, or thud down upon a nipple, smack!

In fact there are no inconsistencies whatever in the conception of Snooty; he isn't an imperfect saint but a perfect behaviorist, perfectly devoid not only of sentiment but of any sense of the real. He shoots Humph by a casual reflex action: "then I fired a second shot, and you may believe me or not, but of all the shots I have ever fired, at all the game I have ever hunted (and this includes the hippopotamus) I don't believe that any shot ever gave me so much pleasure as that second one, at old Humph's shammyleathered gusseted stern, before he rolled off his pony and bit the dust." Eight pages later he is still exulting:

He was dead, he was of no more use to anyone than an old water-logged hat. He had ceased his troubling. . . . I shall never lose that pleasant feeling of immediate satisfaction—the sting of pleasure like the ping of a rifle is as fresh as a daisy, at this moment. It will never lose that quality—*Time cannot dull, use cannot* whatever it is!—A thing of beauty is a joy forever! That second one was a beauty!

That is what Tarr looks like when the fumes of Paris romance are cleared away; and the satirist's laugh, we feel, has become a rictus.

By making the Pierpoint-figure a character *in* the book and a machine like the others, Lewis has in fact destroyed the assumption on which the *Apes* seemed to rest: that there was somewhere in London a real person whose husks of thought the others collected. He is not unaware of the vacuum he has entered. Midway through the book the behaviorist-narrator accidentally apes the gestures of a

mechanical doll in a hatter's window. One or two bystanders glance in astonishment from the one to the other, and the fact suddenly penetrates Snooty's consciousness that, even as the dummy is almost alive, so he himself is almost a dummy.

Snooty shares with the author of *Time and Western Man* a Berkeleyan conviction that, since we know only the outsides of people, they cease to enjoy significant existence when we leave them:

Was I certain, for instance, that Humph still existed, now that I no longer had him beneath my eyes? No I was not. That would be indeed an absurd assumption. It was far *more* absurd to suppose him still moving about, and behaving as I expected him to behave, now that I was no longer there, than to suppose him blotted out or dropped out of existence.

In the presence of the automaton it suddenly occurs to him that there are two sides to this coin:

I knew that I was not always existing either: in fact that I was a fitful appearance. . . . And must I confess it? I was very slightly alarmed. I saw that I had to *compete* with these other creatures bursting up all over the imaginary landscape, and struggling against me to be *real*—like a passionate battle for necessary air, in a confined place.

Since Snooty doesn't quite grasp that his conviction that he creates Humph by observing him is less the consequence of a theory than of his measureless contempt for Humph, he is able to chatter on jauntily to the end of the novel. But evidently Lewis grasped, about the mid-thirties, that the Wild Body had lurched into a blind alley. The failure of *Snooty*—his most finely machined novel—is in a way the theme of *Snooty*; it is as though the narrator,

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having discovered outside the latter's window the irrelevance of his mechanical contempt, lived out the second phase of his adventures and wrote them up to prove that even as a comic technique behaviorism could lead nowhere. (Since by hypothesis nothing whatever leads anywhere, he isn't abashed.) It is only the murkiness of *The Wild Body's* synthetic energy that concealed that fact from writer as from reader in 1927. The much brisker rattletrap of *Snooty's* technique carries the experiment launched five years before into the Persian desert in which this last novel of the automaton phase ends.

Still Lewis hadn't exhausted his cheerful conviction that he could make the trick work. Rattletrap verse was the next vehicle—

As to the trick of the prosody, the method of conveying the matter, Frankly I shall provoke the maximum of saxophone clatter. . . . I shall drive the matter along as I have driven it from the first, My peristalsis is well-nigh perfect in burst upon well-timed burst—I shall drive my coach and four through the strictest of hippical treatises,
I do not want to know too closely the number of beats it is. . . .

One-Way Song (1933), an exasperating work of genius,¹

¹ If for nothing else, it would be worth salvaging for the sake of the first page, a memorable satire on the patent Wyndham Lewis fanfare-opening:

I said (and I always say these things with the same voice)
'Say it with locomotives! Mark well that animal puff!'
Each man-jack of them marked it, every man-jack—all were boys.
'If you must, say it with locofocos! Radical Tammany stuff!
Hot and heavy! As if you meant it! Don't stick at a rough house—real rough!'

But at 'radical,' magical vocable, claps crashed forth of stunning applause, Though rattle-proof, that straightway shattered my heavily pillared doors!

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busies itself with the metaphysics of the forward-moving Present:

Only machines reverse—

All that has mind may not go arsi-versel
Creatures of Fronts we are—designed to hustle
Down paths lit by our eyes, on stilts of clockwork muscle—
And furthermore this clockwork works clockwise,
Forward on vectors traced out by our eyes.

“Master One-Way” is a creature of “progress,” unreal because deprived of a past, an automaton whose being consists of successive instantaneous phenomena. He is, in fact, not unlike Snooty Baronet, and Lewis hectors him sympathetically:

In front you're real.

No one can take that from you. Be a FRONT,
A bold unblushing Frontispiece—a blunt,
A plain blunt Front Man, who's no orator
As Brutus is. A jolly old front-door.
And let the devil take your hindmosts what!
A god in front, behind, a vacant lot,
A Nomansland for trashbins, a nirvana. . . .

If you spurn a modish preoccupation with the past, it is difficult to see how not to land in behaviorism; this is where the War with Time seems to be leading. On the whole, Lewis still prefers behaviorist bustle to the supine

‘Say it’ said I ‘with half-machines!’ And then, sublimely hoarse
With horrid pleasure they *said* it, with puff-puffs—roars upon roars.
The place was soon congested as with a fog of escaping steam.
I gazed in through it at the teamwork proudly, of my loud responsive team,
‘Well that’s enough’ at last I said. ‘You’ve put your backs into *that* all right.
You said it with locomotives honies! That will do I guess for to-night.’

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cult of *temps retrouvé*. If behavior is only mechanically alive it can at least feed thought. He exhorts "Master One-Way" to keep his eyes front; never to look backwards, or slump into a seat beside those who travel through Time with their backs to the engine and "Blindfolded into brand-new futures burst."

Time throws them its spent landscapes—their foreground
Is just-left places—not earth-bound but time-bound!

Though we are to eschew romantic interest in the past, the past nevertheless is indispensable straw for the Time-King's bricks. It deserves to be disdained but not discarded, as in fact too much of it has been:

Coming from Nowhere, our advance is too ideal—
Cut off from the chief ingredient of our 'real,'
The Universe of Absence—disconnect
With all that is not action—no longer reflect—
From the reserves we carry in our hump
We are parted. In consequence we *slump*.—

The Lewisian Man from Nowhere, this implies, didn't really disown the past; he was silently drawing on its resources. But Hanp, as usual, has carried too far his process of aping that figure. The difficulties of the polemicist have greatly increased since the easy days of *Blast*; the gestures and attitudes he then proposed have become in the political thirties the fashionable ones, and what they imply under their present sponsorship is Robothood. The floor beneath his feet is now very thin. The nature of what he persists in regarding as a valid strategy for fecund existence is now almost too tricky to expound, and in summing up the four parts of *One-Way Song* he is driven back to a simple affirmation of his Selfhood:

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The Bailiff billed in Number One 'Fight-talk'
Was a curtain-raiser, to last a minute or two.
Song Two was a sketch of a critical cake-walk,
The romantic standpoint (a good standpoint too).
Song three was Me—the electric hare that's Me—
A Me that blots out for the moment You.
Song Four was the lament of *Not-to-be*,
Conveying that the Me alone is true!

A year later Lewis published *Men Without Art*, a gloomy footnote to polemics and puppet-fiction alike. Destructively, he has never done better. The criticism of Faulkner and Mrs. Woolf is superb, the fantasia on "T. S. Eliot, Pseudoist" affecting not to remember what "this poet-fellow (an American I believe!)" meant to convey in a poem written twelve years earlier is as funny as anything in that chef d'oeuvre of polemic comedy *The Diabolical Principle*. But the steady nihilism of tone becomes explicit in the account of Satire, which is offered not as a moral but as a metaphysical criticism of man.

An animal in every respect upon the same footing as a rat or an elephant, I imagine you will agree—man, except for what the behaviourist terms his word-habit, is that and no more, except for his paradoxical "reason."

Satire possesses its "kick" because it is *true*; because

. . . it is a little odd that animals like ourselves should be enabled—by means of our "word-habits"—to know that we are animals and to be compelled, or indeed *to be able* to go on being animals and behaving as such, and yet perfectly realizing what we are.

Art is "a pure game," and life itself "should also be considered as a game—a game in the sense that no value can

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attach to it *for itself*, but only in so far as it is well-played or badly played."

This is the bottom. After *Snooty Baronet* there is, with the exception of one aborted novel, no more fiction for five years. This novel, *The Roaring Queen*, a hasty attempt to extract a piece of popular fiction from the materials of *The Apes of God*, begins under a full head of steam with a memorable portrait of Arnold Bennett, rechristened "Shodbutt" and adapted to the paradigm of Zagreus, but gradually slumps into perfunctory narrative under the weight of the author's growing conviction that in a counterfeit metaphysical economy nothing is finally worth doing. The energy of presentation on which Lewis had hitherto relied, as on a force of nature, for the first time fails; and reading Lewis chapters unquickened by Lewis prose one is aware as never before that he has in this book no characters, no plot, and no theme but the ubiquity of Nothingness. The people, except for the Bailiff-like Shodbutt, aren't automata: one must lavish contrivance on an automaton. They are perfunctory magpies, as silly as life. The death with which all Lewis novels end is this time a killing as meaningless as a cinder in the eye, unredeemed by Snooty's aesthetic relish. These aren't technical shortcomings: they issue with Euclidean exactness from an attempt to multiply by zero—the nullified outcome of a pure conviction that the artist has to deal with a null world. The sight of *The Roaring Queen* in proof must have been for Lewis a devastating experience; he caused it to be withdrawn unpublished.

Then the incalculable happened. Amid the stresses of a

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protracted illness and an alarmingly troubled Europe, Lewis admitted to his puppets' universe loyalty (Tarr's virtue), the least personal form of love, undercut the professionalism of Snooty's and the young Nazis' disdain for the opposite sex, and on the far side of utter nihilism produced his greatest works both of painting and of fiction.

PART V THE REVENGE OF THE VOID

All ideas *must* (however they may start) be speedily mixed up with the spurious.

1. PORTRAITS

WITHIN THE TWENTY-YEAR PARENTHESIS OCCASIONED BY THE contradictions in *Tarr*, Lewis's painting pursued an energetic development of its own, parallel to the writer's concern with polemics and automata. By unremitting labor during the five years' silence after the War, he developed as impressive a facility in working from Nature as any painter has ever exhibited. At the same time he strove to enrich into stark but dreamlike compositions the geometrics which now seemed to him "bleak and empty" and in need of *filling*. Throughout the twenties fantastic pictures of "a world that will never be seen anywhere except in pictures" elaborated the Caliph's designs, while the polemicist battled for a share of the Caliph's power. In the same years the puppets of *The Apes*, *The Childermass*, and *Snooty* had their visual counterpart in meticulous drawings of figures with considerable skeletal presence, disposed massively or restlessly in seated positions, the ma-

chine of the body rendered with the closest anatomical attention and the savagely intertwined fingers testifying to subhuman tensions, of which, as they lie below the plane of personality, no trace is discernible in the masklike eyeless faces.

There are no persons in these pictures, as there are none in *The Wild Body* or the other automaton fiction. Nor, of course, does the polemic of 1926 to 1935 take any account of persons, except for the author, who freely (and accurately) describes himself as a "genius." Indeed the polemic denies their existence. That people prefer to be "puppets" rather than "natures" and so welcome any conspiracy to keep them that way is its reiterated premise. Outside of polemics, however, this is a formula for getting vitality into Art when there is by hypothesis none in the world, by dividing one's creative personality and staging shadow fights. "The Individual, the isolated, the single object, is, you will admit, an absurdity" *if* it is the only thing in the universe. When the Self brings another being into the world, the new being soon inspires a disgust which, like Arghol's disgust for Hanp, finally engulfs the Self's own *amour-propre*. And when the energy fails that has so fiercely shaken this formula, and you lose interest in animating abstract painting with it, you find that your condition does not differ from that of the sterile split-man Julius Ratner, Ape of God, contemplating himself in the glass:

He gazed at this sphinx which he called self, or rather that others called that, not Ratner—at all events it stood there whatever it was. Impossible to question it. Anything but that could be interrogated, but one's self, from that no one could get an answer, even for Julius it was a sort of ape-like hideous alien. . . . Such as it

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was it was that in which Ratner believed—a rat caught in his own rattrap, for he was cowed and dull, he was yet attached to the fortunes of the rat-self—where it went Ratner would go, Ratner would defend it to the end—only over the dead body of Ratner would another approach it to destroy it. And so on.

The only difference between this self-awareness of a lowly Ape and Arghol's view of Hanp is that Arghol thrives on the black emotional voltages of his superiority to Hanp. Such a superiority to Humph—the Hanp of the later book—is what Snooty loses before the hatter's dummy. And that gone, two courses only are open: either you undergo destruction as did Arghol, or you allow other persons to exist.

In the mid-thirties Lewis's polemic shifted its aim from political analysis to political action, on behalf of people in whose name a war was being brewed over nothing. Simultaneously, out of a sort of act of belief in the existence of other people, he wrote *The Revenge for Love*. By the time this masterpiece was published, he was already at work on the series of portraits which assimilate and justify all the procedures of his career as a visual artist.

In the great portraits of circa 1938—including Eliot, Pound, Spender, and a number of less publicized sitters—the two sorts of images that dominated the work of the nineteen twenties are brought into exciting fusion. The figures, austere icons, inhabit with Egyptian self-sufficiency a world which Wyndham Lewis has imagined, not warm, not vital, spawning no animal hulks. At the same time, calmly alight with unmistakable human vitality, they subject the viewer to tonic scrutiny. Mr. Handley-Read, the biographer of Lewis's painting, has described the dis-

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quietingly *personal* impression that harassed and embarrassed visitors to an exhibition at which no fewer than eight of these portraits were on display at once.

It is in this fusion of personality and remoteness—"burying Euclid deep in the living flesh"—that the contradictions of Tarr are resolved. In 1939 Lewis described the method of "Super-naturalism" as "rapt contemplation" of a nature that now seems "diabolically interesting" and "not quite *natural*." A man under such scrutiny becomes "an object of amazing interest," the more so because Lewis the super-natural portraitist is "never unconscious of those underlying conceptual truths that are inherent in all appearances. But I leave them now where I find them, instead of isolating them in conceptual arabesques." More recently he has averred, "I can never feel any respect for a picture that cannot be reduced, at will, to a fine formal abstraction." So the abstraction constructed by the artist fuses with the conceptual truths discerned in the sitter.

The fictional uses of a corresponding fusion are perhaps limited, but they are real. With the aid of this vision Lewis was able to write for the first time a coherent novel worthy of his talents. The limitations of the method can be brought out by describing it as a procedure for making a virtue out of the old difficulties. Lewis has seldom been successful with more than two characters at once, or a conversation that couldn't be reduced to a wary dialogue. The characters in his novels come alive only when they are in the presence of other characters, or of themselves so projected as to seem other.

This is the clue to the vitality of the 1938 portraits. What the people in the portraits are doing is being *looked at*. They have not been put at their ease. One fancies them

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galvanized by the baleful gaze of Wyndham Lewis, and, like the Baudelairean beggar of Tarr's anecdote, expanding, stretching, and darting fire. Baudelaire wrought this transformation with a club, but Wyndham Lewis's weapon, like Bestre's, is his eye. This invigorating stare, which Eliot evades by slightly averting his eyes and Pound by falling asleep, elicits in most of the sitters an answering quickness. They stare straight back at the viewer of the picture, and in turn disquiet him. So in the painting Lewis's rigor of mind is made to animate the spectator via someone else's social and personal machinery.

Transferred into fiction, this vision will surround the characters on which it is brought to bear with an aura of reality which remains a little inhuman. One can't claim that the author totally grasps his people; he has transferred their simulacra into his own kind of world, where they can put forth the sort of halting vitality manifested by carelessly maintained machines. A little camouflage of triviality, a little of the static human tension that informs the abstract paintings of 1937—"Stations of the Dead," "Players on the Stage," "Departure of a Princess from Chaos"—and we have an acceptable imitation of the social world where the business of novels is transacted. It does not sound like a promising formula, but it engendered a masterpiece.

2. "THE REVENGE FOR LOVE"

WHAT WE HAVE CALLED A CAMOUFLAGE OF TRIVIALITY CAN be localized in many of the conversations. The verbal energy of Wyndham Lewis isn't coursing down wires into

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Margot and Victor in lurid blue pulses. By an *aficionado* of *Tarr* or *The Childermass*, the dialogue of which is almost continuously Lewisian, *The Revenge for Love* might be taken at first sight for a relapse; its dialogue seems largely from the neighborhood cinema:

"Promise me, Victor, not to worry."

"Of course I shan't, Margot," he droned up roughly at her.

"You won't, will you?"

"Of course. I'm just tired." He stretched out and closed his eyes.

"Sleep it off then. That's the best. Bye-bye, darling!" She kissed him.

A minute, and he heard the gentle bang of the front door.

When this is quoted out of context we can see how banal it is. But it isn't likely to strike a reader of the novel as banal; it is simply right. Margot and Victor inhabit squalor with a kind of unbeaten resignation. Victor is a second-rate painter and knows it; he smiles "a Clark Gable smile" at his resilient worshipful schoolgirl of a wife, whose emotions would be those of a girl eating chocolates at the cinema if they were turned inward instead of being fixed leechlike on Victor. These unpromising dummies aren't dead spots in the book's tissue, they are part of it. Their imperfect reality rhymes perfectly with the other components of a novel about the unreal, in which there is only one other character possessing any human reality at all. By the logic of Lewis's antecedent career, *The Revenge for Love*, sacrificing the normal local energy of his prose in an attempt to key the writing down to real people whom he doesn't really grasp as people, should have been a dismal bore. By some unforeseeable miracle of equilibrium it is instead a great novel. It is at last the almost perfect

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articulation of a vision, poised and paradoxically *quiet*, though the vision is what Lewis has elsewhere called "the black material of social truth": Nietzsche's and Machiavelli's vision of the world as a void informed by mere power.

Lewis's views still don't differ essentially from those of the Bailiff in *The Childermass*:

What is brewing here is a dust-storm you understand or an event of no more importance—this is a very arid place, I try to make it a little juicy as you have often observed with displeasure, it is The Plain of Death and is full of an empty whirling underneath—its movements signify nothing: these myrmidons will whirl about and my particles there will agitate and collide, vortex within vortex, mine and thine, with a buzzing of meum and tuum, a fine angry senseless music, it will be an unintelligible beating of the air if we go on just as it will be if we do not.

Since this also epitomizes the use to which, by and large, he has put his impressive talents, we may observe that *The Revenge for Love* is saved, specifically, by Margot Stamp's abashment of her creator's satiric energy. Hanging on the border of non-entity, Margot remains precariously real. Her reality, indeed, is the key to the meaning of the book, and the Lewis prose, addressed for the first time to the presentation of such a figure, respects her eggshell autonomy and that of her husband. The reined prose isn't inert, however; it moves, scattering images with simulated casualness, through the clutter of Margot's awakening sensibility:

As Margot ceased to move, the cymballing of the dilapidated box-mattress came to a stop. Stealthily she adjusted herself upon the ruins of their thirty-shilling love-nest (second-hand, in the Bell

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Street market), in an awkward squatting position—so as not to anger any further the stupid springs. So she remained for a while, unwilling on her side to make the next move. That should have to come from Victor. The springs had spoken—it was for him to salute the day. But Victor played possum, in a sly sham-stupor, cut off from the crass daylight by a husky shoulder. He was having no truck with *this* day!

The tension between the commonplace actions and the unusual modes of expression—asides and epithetic excursions assembled in gimcrack syntax—is what establishes Margot's genuineness for us, throughout the many pages during which her consciousness is the center of attention. Her love for Victor has no sham-Shakespearean trappings; it is pathetic and tenacious, with the random inexplicability that characterizes human attachments. It is really little more than loyalty. We are not asked to believe that eternity is in her lips and eyes, nor that love is stronger than Time, nor on the other hand that her passion is a Lilliputian aberration to be described with mock-eighteenth-century coolness. Her willingness to undergo slow destruction at Victor's side is the sole postulate on which subsequent events are hinged.

The notion of death always—in spite of the fact that she saw how it was quite impracticable for her—brought rest to her mind. For when she had first considered it—before she had realized the catch, from love's standpoint—it had deeply impressed her with its beautiful Journey's End effect. It was *The Heart of the Sunset*—as the girl had written who had killed herself up among the skyscrapers of New York.

The touch of Gerty MacDowell in this is counterpoised by the fact that Margot doesn't dwell on the rhetoric of hurling herself from the eightieth story. The clichés of the

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penny press soothe her without kinetic allure. Though there seems no reason why she should not think of death, she stubbornly undergoes her life of protracted devotion.

In manuscript the book was called *False Bottoms*. Margot and Victor are drawn innocently into the vortex of the Bloomsbury Communist set. At a party at Sean O'Hara's,

. . . she could not reach out, to express her misgivings, into the difficult realms of speech, where all these disparities of thinking and acting would fall into place and be plausibly explained: but she was conscious nevertheless of a prodigious *non-sequitur*, at the centre of everything that she saw going on around her—of an immense *false-bottom* underlying every seemingly solid surface, upon which it was her lot to tread.

The focus of the cocktail party is Percy Hardcaster, an agitator who has uselessly and unglamorously lost a leg in a prison break in Spain. For the benefit of the salon-Reds, Percy transforms himself into a piece of atrocity propaganda:

A red patriarch, Percy Hardcaster reclined, propped by a plethora of red cushions, upon a wide reddish settee, in Red invalid magnificence. . . . Of course all the men thought constantly how exceedingly unpleasant it would be to have a wooden leg. It made their own legs feel quite uncomfortable to look at it—and they couldn't help looking at it, Percy saw to that! . . . But one and all in their hearts determined that it was more necessary than ever to see to it that they should remain the *brains* of the Revolution.

These "fish and fowl and more or less good red herrings"—including "three sturdy 'independents' ('friends of Soviet Russia') from the headquarter-staff of the Book Racket"—aren't of course the brains of anything. They are mere butts for the class-war maneuvers of Percy, the thorough

professional. Percy conceives himself to be a competent operator ("We have to be workmanlike and do our stuff in a workmanlike way. . . . I was speaking to you as a technician speaks") who is delivered Tarr-like by his craftsman's detachment into independence from the bourgeois need for a "little bit of sentiment." Part of his job, of course, is to foster those sentiments and elicit the stock responses ("How perfectly beastly! It's like hearing about the Inquisition, isn't it?") that will be of use to the Party. Embarricaded in his arsenal of techniques, he imagines himself to be the one emancipated individual in a world of dupes.

The real boss, however, is Abershaw, who makes money out of, among other things, gun sales. Abershaw isn't holed up in an office. He is a bland, droll clubman, with the impresario's tact, capable of "rising and walking over to the mantelpiece, against which he leaned in an eighteenth-century pose—there is nothing like a mantelpiece for emphasizing the possession of the *bel air*, and Abershaw was fond of mantelpieces." In Victor Stamp, the craftsman of minimal talents whose residual integrity has debarred him from the facile successes of the art world, Abershaw sees a trained "hand," powerless because starving, and offers him a job ("You could start on Monday") forging Van Goghs for sale to moneyed gulls.

"Thanks, old man. I prefer to go on the dole," said Victor.

"Love on the dole!" Abershaw embalmed in a guttural chuckle the title of the play, and rolled his eyes merrily at Margot, who responded with a sickly smiling to his pleasantry. There was no question but what the underworld of the half-real was getting out-of-hand. The creatures who had crept out of that False-Bottom

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beneath all things were taking an interest in Victor. They were commencing to sniff round her precarious nest. . . . Help him to work honestly they *would* not. That was a fixed principle of theirs. But they would give him a leg-up on the ladder of *fraud*, with the greatest pleasure. . . . A genius like Victor was not allowed to make an honest living. They hated his honesty. . . .

Victor, who knows he is no genius, throws in his lot briefly with the power-game ("might as well be doing that as anything else"), rebels, and is marked out by Abershaw for destruction. Abershaw has no objection to duping Percy Hardcaster as well. He goes through the motions of putting Percy in charge of a gunrunning scheme, with Victor to drive the false-bottomed, bootlegger's bus over the border. It has been arranged, of course, that Victor shall be caught; his function is merely to divert official eyes from the real *coup* some miles away.

He and Margot are not caught, however. Having killed a Civil Guard before they discover that their vehicle, allegedly crammed with machine guns, secretes nothing but bricks, they strike out on foot for the hills, and encountering in a Pyrenees storm the epitome of false bottoms, drop to death over a precipice. A forged letter planted in the pocket of Victor's corpse restores Hardcaster to a Spanish jail, where he melodramatically eschews bitterness.

Yes, in his way, and all allowance made for the backslidings of the spirit, he was glad to be back in prison! Was it not in the last analysis his proper place? It was what the trench was for the Tommy.

This isn't a sense of guilt but a sense of *métier*; Percy is surrounded by his illusion of professionalism to the last. There is now one chink in the illusion, however; the circle doesn't quite close. He is troubled by memories of Margot,

whose "strained and hollow voice, part of a sham-culture outfit, but tender and halting, as if dismayed by the sound of its own bitter words, was talking in his ears, in a reproachful singsong. It was denouncing him out of the past, where alone now it was able to articulate; it was singling him out as a man who led people into mortal danger, people who were dear beyond expression to the possessor of the artificial, the unreal, yet penetrating voice. . . ."

This voice undercuts Percy's autonomy; the one thing recalcitrantly real in the universe of the book remains Margot's love, tinsel though it is with delusions concerning the plane of Victor's worthiness. She never gave up faith in his "genius."

3. THE UNREAL

IN RETROSPECT WE CAN SEE MORE CLEARLY THAN EVER THAT Lewis has always specialized in unreality. His people—Tarr, Kreisler, the Bailiff, Horace Zagreus, Snooty Baronet—have "explained" the universe in some way or other and behave accordingly, until their behavior (the translation of theory into action) betrays them by dropping them over the precipice that surrounds every theory. They are suspended (like all men, their creator would say) over a void, and are radically unaware of the existence of any things or persons except themselves. Things acquire a kind of realness only when the mind has worked them over. Without, life presents phenomena, to be ordered by analysis, and from the theoretical activity judgments and sig-

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nificant behavior flow. Within, the hidden self ferments with the bitter chemistry of the will. Tom, Dick, and Harry project willed worlds from the *self*; they inhabit a universe compliant to their appetites (hence, in *The Revenge for Love*, the satyr Jack, tax accountant, skirt-chaser, and "good fellow"). The elite involve analytic machinery with the *not-self*. They too will their worlds, but their willed worlds have at best the intricate articulation of a Lewis drawing, sheer energetic flats of wedges, planes, and lights from which emerge transmuted fragments of observed forms. Some of the elite have been statesmen, some artists. And they are the people whose personalities are of interest.

Lewis's fiction as a whole, then, concerns itself with the unreal, with gradations of unreality (chemical manifestations vs. ready-made costumes), with groups of people engaged in explicating by their actions some theorem in the Metaphysic of the Void. Naturally, a good deal of it—not the best part—can be classified as satire. One may distinguish (a) anatomies of some phony world: the Bloomsbury of *The Apes of God*, the playground of romantic action in *Snooty Baronet*; (b) the *Wild Body* stories, which are concerned with primitive societies, Breton and Spanish, from which the writer extracts some mechanism of personality so emphatic that it passes for "character" and so complex in its rhythmic scheme that it gears at every point with the social mechanisms around it and passes for "life"; (c) the purely abstract fantasies—*The Enemy of the Stars* and *The Childermass*—in which a universe of words and images seeks by its extreme local brilliance to afford an aesthetic substitute for any "given" world; and (d) three "novels" of a more traditional sort:

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Tarr, *The Revenge for Love*, *The Vulgar Streak*. These books deal with the predicaments of real people betrayed by their own nothingness. *Tarr* suffers, as we have seen, from its attempt to juxtapose Arghol's reality and that of human beings. *The Revenge for Love* and *The Vulgar Streak*, more especially the former, are classics of our time. *The Revenge for Love* is a great novel. It is not only, despite flaws any schoolmaster could indicate, a great piece of writing, it has a genuine plot: not a mere sequence of motions through which characters are pushed while the essential points are made in rhetorical asides, nor yet one of the standard bourgeois fables reclothed Maugham-wise, but an action the conception of which was as much an act of genius as any concatenation of epithets in the book, an action of tragic scope and simplicity that suffices to absorb and display the energies of the characters and, without irrelevant voltage, illuminates their world.

The theme for which he finally discovered a plot goes back to "Cantelman's Spring-Mate," which might well have been titled *The Revenge for Love*. "Cantelman," we remember, was in intention a parable on the disharmony of reason and power, though it made its point a little groggily, the author having gotten hypnotized with the rhythm of his own passes. From the beginning, Lewis has been aware that something has been omitted from the analytic activity engaged in by the successive Cantelmans in his fiction; but the things of which they have no adequate realization never, until *The Revenge for Love*, adequately got into the writing. Percy Hardcaster, however, a latter-day Cantelman in his conception of himself as a detached operative, receives comic instead of grimly lyric treat-

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ment. When near the beginning of the book he sits awaiting the prison-break, his irritation with the celebrated Spanish night sets his professionalism at a discount: "Glaring through this tenuous opening, he could see the moon-lit water, of bronzed milk, in the path of the moon, with an oily shimmer reminiscent of the bottom of a sardine tin; and in his ear was the buzz of a mosquito, which he had just driven off." His glare and the moon's sardine tin are bathetic complementaries; nature is more than neutral, it is unreasonably offensive. If the pendulum of Percy's sensibility has swung away from romance, it hasn't found the point of impassive rest he would claim. So in the later scene, one of the showpieces of the book, in which he gives an orthodoxly Pink lady the ruthless low-down on real shooting Communism ("We Communists prefer to see things *as they are*, Jill. We of the working-class . . . are given a raw deal and a *plain* deal. You still feel lost without your little bit of sentiment.") and is beaten with electric yet mechanical viciousness by the sex-automaton Jack for insulting her vanity, the reader who savors the contrast between Percy the professional and the half-real amateur Reds still isn't taken in by the phrase "See things *as they are*."

This beating, the first of the two acts of cataclysmic violence in the book, restages in fact the kicking of Arghol at the outset of *The Enemy of the Stars* in a way that suggests the irrelevant neutrality such actions now seem to Lewis to possess. Percy isn't kicked because he is Arghol, the Self, the thing sensual mankind have conspired to destroy, though it is true that he has just finished posing as something of the kind. He is kicked because he hap-

pens to be in the way of Jack's libido. Nor is Percy allowed to destroy himself Kreisler-like at the close. When Margot's imagined voice in the cell at the end of the book forces on him the half-realization that his bleak dispassionate view of life, "seeing it steadily, seeing it whole, and computing his handicap to the millimetre," has left out something essential, it is no eleventh-hour peripeteia for reader and author. Percy is a Wyndham Lewis (in fact "Percy" is Wyndham Lewis's first name), but he is a Wyndham Lewis at whom, for the first time, Lewis can look. The creator of Cantelman and Tarr scrutinized them most imperfectly. So Hardcaster, dropping a glycerine tear on the prison floor at the news that he has been an instrument in the destruction of other and real people, isn't, when the curtain goes down, Arghol the Outcast of the Absolute: simply a middle-class Englishman posing to himself as The Injured Party.

It belongs to the nature of Lewis's mind and material, of course, that his overwhelming merits lie very close to chaos. The details of his best prose depend on the author's will alone; there are no roads through a vacuum. Similarly, the behavior of his characters depends on their will alone, and the structure of their will depends on the syllogistic intellect. They cannot *see* much, though they can *persuade themselves* of anything. They explain the world, then base a personality and a mode of behavior on the explanation. Lewis has done this several times himself: the wild man, craftsman, clubman, and prophet of successive polemical books aren't simply masks; each seems temporarily to absorb the whole man, and to spring out of an exhaustive rationale. "*Never*," he wrote in "The Code of a Herdsman,"

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"fall into the vulgarity of assuming yourself to be one ego. . . . In order to live you must remain broken up." If you alone are real, you must multiply yourself to obtain the elbowroom of possible worlds.

With *The Revenge for Love*, however, he became engaged for the first time with an adequate theme: the possible worlds of political theory, each enclosing its quota of nothingness and clamped around the head of its devotee like an opaque fishbowl. Hardcaster has explained the world in terms of professionalism: he is a lower-class allotrope of the Public School Englishman, "doing his bit" on the barricades. Abershaw has explained it in terms of power; Gillian Phipps in terms of "communism"; Margot Stamp in terms of Victor. Only Margot is devoted to anything more than an idea.

As for Victor, he is a remarkable creation: a man of stamp dwelling on the borders of nothingness. As Hardcaster is Lewis the polemicist reduced to an "injured party," so Stamp is Lewis the artist deprived of his genius. Lewis perhaps made his acquaintance from the inside in the sickening moment when he decided to withdraw *The Roaring Queen*. We first meet him engaged in a gamble with fate; he will paint a passable picture, or put his head in the gas oven. The picture is passable. "It was worth nothing—from any point of view; for of course no one would give anything for a picture of that sort to-day, unless it had a Name attached to it (and Stamp was not a name) and not much then. But it was amusing it should have turned out that way. It altered nothing—he had wasted two more hours, that was all." When we next see Victor painting, he is sitting in the fake-masterpiece factory,

dressed up as Van Gogh, doing a self-portrait (he is not required to forge the signatures, only the pictures). He calls a halt by putting his foot through the canvas. In the end it is a forgery of his own signature—the name of a nobody—that traps him. The metaphysic of names is at least as important an image as the false-bottom for denoting the vision of nonbeing surrounding the characters.

And the “resistant and finely-sculptured surface of sheer words” of Lewis’s earlier ideal gives place to a finer and subtler prose, still inimitable but now conformed to a subject matter not itself. Margot by the Spanish stream undergoes the same sudden conviction of the implacable neutrality of Nature that had settled on Cantelman in the English spring; “she reserved her right to remain *outside* of nature, now it came to the point; not to participate in its sunny dream.”

Under different circumstances, however, the behaviour of these jolly liquids, the phlegmatic grandeur of these chaotic stones, would have called forth other responses; all would have passed off quite differently had her mind not been obsessed with the actors, for whom these pastoral sets were the incongruous backgrounds, and if she had not been part of this agony of men. It was Victor who was her *nature* now; and “wild nature” too, at that. So the company of nature—all the blatant bustle of these liquids and gasses, and the chilly festivity of the organic bodies attached to them, propelled upon wing, foot, fin—did not recommend itself to her, greatly to her surprise. Though was that to be wondered at, seeing that it jazzed around her breaking heart, so that she was astonished, if not almost scandalized.

One no longer suspects that, as in “Cantelman,” this is Lewis affirming antiromanticism; it is Margot affirming the human, with its bitter obligation to take action, and re-

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jecting the womb-world of Ruskin and Tennyson. There is nothing sardonic about Lewis's narration of the gesture by which she leaves *Sesame and the Lilies* by the stream-side, as she starts back rapidly to the town to overtake Victor and join him in the enterprise that ends in death.

4. THE END OF ARGHOL

FOUR YEARS LATER LEWIS PUBLISHED A NEW NOVEL, WHICH, despite its relative thinness, maintains his curve of development near the high point marked by the story of Percy Hardcaster. *The Vulgar Streak* resumes the classic Lewis pattern: phony master (the man out of nowhere), phony disciple, the "Saltimbanques" plot, and the final cataclysm. But it is resumed with a difference: the elaborate suppression of the protagonist's past isn't the author's rhetoric of mystification but part of a plot whose machinery, well lubricated and tuned for a final run, makes straight for the necessary precipice and wrecks itself without fuss.

The time is mid-1939, and there are signs that the author meant to link the themes of this smoothly written book more explicitly with the political events of those months than he in fact did. The mythological simplicity of the plot, however, is sufficient without rubrics to imply the late history of Europe. Vincent Penhale is exhibited in the overture taking his leisure in Venice, the city built on pilings in the Adriatic mud, at a time when less self-confident tourists are checking out of the bleakly de luxe

hotels and hastening to get home before the war starts. He is vaguely reputed to be a luxury-class swell in London—perhaps a decorator or dress-designer—and he is engaged in seducing a moneyed girl—he is wealthy enough and confident enough for that. We next discover that he has emerged by sheer will power from a working-class slum, by refining his accent and manners. The work of Arnold Bennett is concentrated into one wonderful chapter, the Pygmalion myth so dear to Bernard Shaw into another, as the book articulates Vincent's conviction that only a few gestures and tricks of pronunciation separate class from class. Vincent has simply elected the more luxurious unreality. The denouement comes with the unlucky revelation that he has been supporting his elegance by passing counterfeit money. Governments, it is true, do this all the time; currency, like "class," is what people can be persuaded to accept. (Victor Stamp's passable picture would have been salable with another name signed to it, and the proprietors of the forging factory rationalize their business by claiming that Van Gogh himself once forged Rembrandts.) But Vincent, up till now the Wyndham Lewis character par excellence, comes to an un-Lewisian realization that he has woven the wind and harmed others by it, and hangs himself, leaving nothing behind but a character reference his butler won't care to show.

There is no gratuitous drama; this last of the Arghols is a fraud and applies Arghol's prescription because there is nothing left to do.

There, hanging from the disused gas-suspension in the middle of the hall, was Mr. Penhale, his tongue protruding, and his face black.

THE REVENGE OF THE VOID

A piece of white paper, in the manner of a placard, was attached to his chest.

There is no pretense that the world heaves a sigh of relief, and no lather about the Universe of Absence. The placard reads simply, "Whoever finds this body, may do what they like with it. *I don't want it. Signed.* Its former inhabitant." So Lewis bids farewell to the Wild Body he piloted from Brittany to Chamberlain's London.

The Vulgar Streak is almost unobtainable; most of the publisher's stock was bombed in the warehouse. It ought to be reissued, much more than any other out-of-print Lewis book. It is a superb novel, if a melancholy protem finale to the most astonishing literary career of the twentieth century. The man to whose mind the Cartesian split and the Nietzschean energy were not hobbies but life-blood, who having made the center of his world a vacuum, was better equipped than anyone else to write out of inner knowledge the tragedy of his time, who conjured out of nothing with a mind more lively than that of any other novelist a new prose and a new kind of fiction, devoted his most rapid and functional writing to bringing the values he discerned in an entire civilization, and (transposed into the prerogatives of genius) largely shared with it, up short at the end of a rope.

PART VI TO BE CONTINUED

This short story of mine has the drawback of having its tragedy to some extent sublimated. Also, we have no ending. . . . I merely change from pen to dictaphone.

IT WOULD HAVE BEEN PRESUMPTUOUS EVEN THEN TO SAY that he would write no more, though the period of silence that followed the suicide of Vincent Penhale was the longest in Lewis's career. It was broken in 1948 with the publication of *America and Cosmic Man*. A year later he completed a new and melancholy survey of his public life, published late in 1950 as *Rude Assignment*. On May 10, 1951 there appeared in *The Listener* an article entitled "The Sea-Mists of the Winter." It was by nature of a leave-taking: "My articles on contemporary art exhibitions necessarily end, for I can no longer see a picture."

"Whatever I say can be traced back to an organ," he had written proudly twenty-four years before. "It is *the eye*. It is in the service of the things of vision that my ideas are mobilized." In 1951 he was blind. His last drawing was the jacket-design for a reissue of *Tarr*.

The public announcement of his new condition is tinged with unexpected relish at the experience of undergoing

TO BE CONTINUED

in fact the sort of trivial adventures through which for years he had shoved his fictional puppets:

It amuses me to collide with a walking belly; I quite enjoy being treated as a lay-figure, seized by the elbows and heaved up in the air as I approach a kerb, or flung into a car. I relish the absurdity of gossiping with somebody the other side of the partition. I am not allowed to see them. I am like a prisoner condemned to invisibility, although permitted an unrestricted number of visitors.

This is Snooty's conviction of the absurdity of the body, rendered with a new geniality. As Lewis wrote in his last piece of art criticism (an account of Calder's mobiles in *The Listener*, January 18, 1951),

It is easy to understand how a machine which has taken to thinking, like Man, should develop hysteria in contemplating itself, and have a laughing fit about its hearing holes, its smelling and breathing holes, its intestinal barrel on legs. But whether the machines man creates do, as extensions of his mind, share in such reactions I am not competent to decide. I can only speak with confidence of a locomotive (not the stream-lined latest model, but the traditional puff-puff). That *knows* that it is absurd. There is no doubt about that.

Not that whimsy has dissolved the old aggressiveness: "Pushed into an unlighted room, the door banged and locked for ever, I shall then have to light a lamp of aggressive voltage in my mind to keep at bay the night." The writer, for all his cult of the visible, has been deprived of none of his essential tools. In *The Childermass*, where everything is visual, nothing depends on fresh notation of accidental nuances and shadow tones. Its subtlest effects are drawn not from the tingle of recent observation but from the vocabulary laid up in a well-stocked visual memory:

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They stagger forward, two intoxicated silhouettes, at ten yards cut out red in the mist. The mist is thickened round their knees with a cloudy gossamer that has begun to arrive from inland, moving north by east. Only trunks and thighs of human figures are henceforth visible. There are torsos moving with bemused slowness on all sides; their helmet-capped testudinate heads jut this way and that. In thin clockwork cadence the exhausted splash of the waves is a sound that is a cold ribbon just existing in the massive heat. The delicate surf falls with the abrupt clash of glass, section by section.

With steady courage, fortified perhaps by the knowledge that no privation in "the land of blind-man's-buff" need interfere with the vision that operates through writing like that, Lewis capped his farewell article with one of the most memorable phrases in the annals of personality: "Milton had his daughters, I have my dictaphone."

He was not crushed; he had entered a new phase. In the 1950's we encounter a new Lewis prose, in which bland stoicism releases his energies for subtler verbal effects. Some of the stoicism is implicit in the logic of his career: *The Vulgar Streak* was the fierce conclusion of the meteor's parabola traced by Arghol. More of it is implicit in the bleak situation of postwar Britain: the War was the suicide of the West, re-enacting Penhale's. The Caliph in Lewis had failed; he had had no effect. Or rather he had not so much opposed as dramatized the history of his time. Europe, since Descartes first divided the intellect from the absurd mechanism of the body, has been engaged in pursuing the career of Wyndham Lewis.

It is notorious that thought and feeling were carefully divided in the nineteenth century, and men like Arnold and Tennyson and Lewis Carroll operated a prose self and a poetic self which they seldom permitted to com-

TO BE CONTINUED

municate with each other. This was the context Lewis inherited; and he sought to transfer poetry into prose, feeling into the intellect, congealing into bright patterns such emotions as had a practicable freezing-point and repudiating the rest as trivial. Love, fellowship, all the passions which the previous generation had soaked with sentiment, Lewis sought to cast off as beneath the notice of art. Hence the bravado of Tarr trying to disentangle himself from the leechlike Bertha Lunken. Then Lewis mechanized himself, and so did the West; then he junked this mechanism in Vincent Penhale's despoiled flat, while the West was engaged in a prolonged self-immolation. So this tough-minded failure of sixty-five was right all the time about Western Man, and largely wrong in thinking that he was himself providing an antithesis. Hence the mental climate of his postwar books.

The Writer and the Absolute, as vigorous a book of criticism as he has written since the 1920's, appeared two years after the announcement of his blindness. The strictures on Sartre, Camus, and Malraux are continuous in principle with the early ones on Bergson, Stein, and Lawrence. Existentialism is the latest (or is it the final?) heir of the herding dissolving Time-Philosophy against which The Enemy once so notably mobilized his forces. Sartre's *cyclone-aesthetic* apotheosizes "the hot and passionate immediacy of the crudeness of living" as the rather philosophic Lawrence never succeeded in doing; its "fragmentary peepshow," its rapture at having to treat "an epoch which is 'incomprehensible' because you have your face jammed up against it," its transformation of noncomprehension into a sensational asset, all these are the doctrines

of Impressionism up-to-date, girded to deal with the empirical chaos, intellectual and moral, to which the disintegrating forces of which Impressionism was itself a by-product have now reduced the very subject matter of all perception. When Manet and Corot took a stance "in front of infinite nature with their little paint-box," relying on her to "do their thinking and seeing for them," the Impressionist intermingling of subject and object affected only a few spangled trees or some placid picnickers by a lazy stream. In the days when Lewis was scorning their passive notations in *Blast*, Marinetti's attempts to incorporate these doctrines into wider areas of experience with the aid of a factitious dynamism deriving its sanctions from sensational "Life" seemed only a comic diversion, to be suitably answered by leading a band of hecklers into a Futurist meeting in Bond Street. By the mid-twenties Lewis was aware of what amounted to a universal conspiracy against the intelligence on the one hand and the integrity of that which the intelligence contemplates on the other. By 1952 the process outlined in *Time and Western Man* and *The Diabolical Principle* had reached its term. Sartre, Lewis suggests, has so far lost the taste for meaningful liberty that his psyche requires to be quite rigidly supported by an absolutism of some sort: the extreme case of conformity to the time. As for the fragmentation of things and people,

A man having delivered up his soul, not to the Devil but to the tree outside his window—to his coal scuttle and "bedroom suite" and to all the objects he can lay his eyes on, then suddenly cuts himself off from all this, from the external world. . . . In this empty shell our Existentialist flings himself on the floor and contemplates

TO BE CONTINUED

this echoless vacuity. Hence all the accompaniments of existential thought—"Angst" or "Anguish," "Dereliction," "Loneliness," and "Despair."

If *The Writer and the Absolute* documents Lewis's bleak triumph at having had his polemics of a quarter-century previous confirmed by a postwar world surpassing in hopelessness for the arts his extremest rhetorical exaggerations, it also adduces a perspective centered as no previous writing of Lewis's has been on the claims of empirical reality. The opening chapter, headed "Objective Truth," reaps the speculative harvest of the last novels and the great portraits. No longer does Arghol create his world:

What holds the true apart from the false is of great force. This can be illustrated in the works of famous writers, but it is in the case of the great masters of painting that the operation of this instinct occurs with all the publicity of the visible. . . . Chardin, with a bland intensity, fastens his eye, impacts his gaze forever, upon some object of daily use. Van Eyck, with the same intense animal absorption and austere tenacity, upon Arnolfini and his wife. The *true* image must be put down. Delicate, minute, must be the inventory of truth. Is this imitation? Because of a pressure as irresistible as gravitation the artist cleaves to the truth.

No longer, either, does Tarr create himself:

Upon reflection, and after the momentary elation of feeling that he is battling *his* way into *his* future—like an American marine in a tropical jungle infested with Japs; or "creating" himself, as an artist "creates"—the more modest and sensible man recognizes that he is not after all a work of art—that the *initial* creation was far beyond his powers or that of any man: that as for his *future* (for all his self-creation and following the precepts of action-at-any-price) all that can happen is that the Ford car may increase in size and (with luck) he may do rather more than keep-up-with-the-Joneses.

No longer is Lewis concerned with the melodramatic issue of Self vs. Flux; the major premise of *The Writer and the Absolute* is not the autonomy of Self but that of *the real*. The battleline, Lewis has come to perceive, has really been drawn all the time between the human appetite to perceive what is, and the forces that would forbid or embarrass that perception.

Surprisingly few of the early formulations require modification to suit this shift of premises. Though things, now "real," assert a new primacy, a kettle is still not as fine as a man, and the early opposition (*Blast* No. 2) of "dead arrangements by the tasteful hand without" to "instinctive organizations by the living will within" still operates as a discriminating principle against the *natures mortes* of postimpressionism. There is little to alter in *Time and Western Man*. What has become anachronistic for the postwar Lewis is the tone of predatory arrogance that saturated the old polemics. The persona implied by that tone retains its artistic validity—"The Code of a Herdsman" remains as fine a work as ever—but it has abandoned its claim to being a philosophic fulcrum.

I have large strong teeth which I gnash and flash when I laugh. But usually a look of settled and aggressive naivete rests on my face. I know much more about myself than people generally do.

For the Lewis of *The Writer and the Absolute* this gesture from the opening of *The Wild Body* would no longer claim what it once seemed to. Ker-Orr, it grows clear in retrospect, was himself an exponent of "cyclone-aesthetic," his face jammed up against material which he imagined himself to be seeing with perfect detachment.

TO BE CONTINUED

Such a past still has its uses. An antiseptic smell of personality hangs over Lewis's latest and most flexible prose, a last whiff lingering from the drinking bouts of the old rampaging Self. It quickens into acrid significance the most casual arrangements of words. In the dry kindliness of his 1948 memoir of Eliot's early days in London we can detect a deftness born of long practice in the satirist's art of torturing dummies:

This very small room, in which Mr. Eliot had alighted, and in which he sat placidly smiling, was, allowance made for the comic side of Ezra's manic herding of talent, a considerable place. Dorothy Shakespeare had become Dorothy Pound and of course was in this dwarf room too, nodding, with a quick jerk of the head, unquestioning approval of Ezra's sallies, or hieratically rigid as she moved delicately to observe the Kensingtonian Tea ritual. (Long habit in the paternal mansion responsible, she was a good turncoat *bourgeoise*, who wore her red cockade with a grim pleasant *gaucherie*). In any event, all social transactions were necessarily *intime*. One at a time was their rule for genius.

Mr. Eliot would presently be taken to a much larger place—where there would be more than just a crowded little triangle to sit in: not so important yet an essential part of Ezra's exiguous social machine. For those not familiar with the hills and valleys of London, the event with which I opened took place practically at the foot of Notting Hill. Now almost at the top of that hill stood a squarish Victorian mansion, of no great size but highly respectable, within whose walls Ford Madox Ford (then known as Hueffer) lived and entertained with Violet Hunt. A gate in a tall wall gave access to it, and standing in the center of a patch of grass, just visible from the pavement, was a large carving of Ezra by Brzeska. It was Ezra in the form of a marble phallus. Mr. Eliot would have to be taken here.

He can invest such anecdotes with a marvelous blankness. The syntax is as far from fastidiousness as ever, but its

disorder now functions rather than constricts. The comedy isn't an imparted tone, but intrinsic with what is being said. By not seeming to make too much of any of his details, Lewis releases from them, within a convention whose casualness resembles that of a civilized letter-writing, quantities of unexpected comic significance. Into this as-tringent geniality has disappeared the Vorticist Romance, which Lewis always pretended he was without but in fact was forty years exorcising.

In the lowered vitality of his latest phase there are, of course, losses as well as profits. In *Rotting Hill* (1952), a book of sketches and stories of postwar England, we are less often aware of a new Lewis than of the old Lewis's ghost, his pessimism imperfectly purged of a sense of injury. The accent and echo of the famous style are audible in every phrase, but the weary briskness of an overtaxed spring has replaced the energy that used to course down the pages bearing with it a-tumble such quantities of heteroclite material. Among less impressive exhibits, the book contains some convincing vignettes (notably "The Rot") of Britain-as-poorhouse, an amusingly frigid dialogue ("My Disciple") in which the ambition of the author of *The Caliph's Design* for a band of acolytes who will "kill John Bull with Art" comes to ironic fulfilment, and a remarkable story, "Time the Tiger," in which we get our last glimpse of the War with Time.

"My Disciple" is a Mr. Gartsides who has moved with innocent energy into art education.

"I can make people enthusiastic," he assured me brightly, "I can make them see what I see. . . . You remember what you said in your book about the artist and the engineer?"

TO BE CONTINUED

"That they should co-operate?" I looked at the clock.

"That's right. That's what I'm going to do up in the college—make the engineers art-conscious. They never think about art. I want to make them see they can use art in their work."

"I see." I looked at the clock; but I was unable to make him time-conscious. I had not his power to make people see what I saw—at least not when it was a timepiece.

"Why don't you go out, Mr. Lewis, and make people enthusiastic, make people see what you see?"

"My way of doing that is to paint pictures," I told him. "I paint pictures of a world that will never be seen anywhere except in pictures."

"You don't think so? But the day of the easel-picture is over."

The easel-picture is an individualist form; Mr. Gartsides wants the artist's energies put into the world outside: "Spread his vision around—in things that people can touch—eat out of—*live* in! Their houses, their clothes." He is the voice of *Transition* once again. He deprecates his own pictures:

"Are they not good?" I asked.

"No, they're rotten," he assured me.

"Your activities are mainly destructive"—I assumed the air of one musing.

"No, I am creative. I can fill people with enthusiasm."

"For what?"

"For art."

These are Hanp's last words; Arghol has taught him perfectly. In this last of the several dozen forensic dialogues with which his work is punctuated, Lewis contemplates with unblinking animosity the spectacle of his own ideas being mixed up with "the void which is an essential part of everything." "My Disciple" is the epilogue to his polemic career.

"Time the Tiger," on the other hand, belongs with the best of Lewis's fiction. Its existence alone gives us ample reason for supposing that the author of *The Revenge for Love* has still significant work ahead of him. This story has Lewis's predilected rhythm: a long slow narrative suddenly truncated by violence. The unreal logical world into which the violence breaks is, this time, the never-land of socialist Britain, the grotesque phenomena of which he renders, in painstaking shabby detail, as though a portion of *The Childermass* were being rewritten in the accent of *The Old Wives' Tale*. The man from nowhere is, this time, a petty socialist, his companion a hearty petty Tory feeding his good-humored wrath on the past. The two pass a typical day among inefficient telephone operators, shabby doctors, vendors of defective shirts, and deceptively sumptuous oculists and dispensing opticians. The dice aren't loaded; the relics of Charles's Tory world are as drained of vitality as the denizens of Mark's socialist one. Mark—an Arghol grown old—deludes himself mechanically, but his Utopia remains a hollow box in which rattle a few shabby phenomena. It had never even the aesthetic purity to qualify as a Vorticist dream now transposed ("souillure") from the mind into life. Time, they agree, has leapt upon them; the fifty years since 1900, when the bee was in the clover and all was well with the world, have contained a millennium of events, and the two men, whose very friendship, a legacy of the twenties, is now unreal, are prompted by a French film to desultory speculation on devouring Time. Mark is convinced that he has been reborn into the new era, his adoption of socialism a mystical baptism; whereas Charles,

TO BE CONTINUED

he thinks, is now a ghost from a past life, whom he contemplates almost as Snooty did Humph.

The crisis occurs at lunch with Charles's sister, whom Mark has long yearned after but hasn't seen for fourteen years. He has been perplexed by dreams in which she grows old and dies; but the well-fleshed woman at the restaurant table seems to have discovered the trick of denying Time.

Ida looked—oh, around twenty-five. The lazy laughing lips of Rossetti's Jenny ("fond of a kiss and fond of a guinea") were as roseate and indolent as ever: her eyes were steady, an almost imperceptible dance, as well, giving them a remote glitter of gaiety.

As if it were a *top*, humming and spinning on without changing position, perhaps she would go on being like this until suddenly time asserted itself and she would stop dead. . . .

Ida claims no miracles:

She shook her 'twenties curls with a nervous and defensive mirth. "A little vanishing-cream, combined with an empty mind, is quite enough," she laughed. So he and the woman he had always been in love with—and had not married any other because she was always there in his imagination—eyed one another benignly. He exposed his haunted vacuum, and she automatically entered and warmed it to the temperature of paradise.

Their talk takes them back to the euphoria of the twenties; "they were a party heated by the suns of the past." Undoing Time, "the three old friends rolled again in memory in the Swiss snows at Wengen—or drifted talking very youngly along 'The High' on their way to Blackwell's to buy Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*." Suddenly the tiger leaps: Ida, drunk, begins to declaim politics. Mark half-rises: "I am not going to listen to this nonsense"; and his

soul is suddenly utterly empied of the quantum of romance it has all these years been harboring. "He had consented to play Romeo, and Juliet, at the critical moment, had acquired the mask of Col. Blimp, haranguing him from the moonlit balcony." That evening, in loneliness, he writes to another woman. "These were the final pangs of Mark's rebirth into a novel age, as well as the death-throes of Ida's image. But he did not identify his pangs: he did not analyse. He went to his desk, took out a piece of note-paper and wrote 'My dead Wendy.' Wendy Richardson was a good party-woman, with a pretty face. . . ."

A few months later he and Charles exchange stilted notes; and that is the end.

This story about politics is a triumph of poise. There is no scowling showman on the stairs, who has learned much from Bestre about the aggrandizement of the null. The people are real, and their world; and behaving with a resilience that always commands respect, they invite a pity that is never excessive. For the focus isn't on the rightness or wrongness of any human arrangements, nor on the grimacing absurdity of any puppet. It is on the fact that three people's lives have been ruined.

Erratum

page 152, line 10
for *dead* read *dear*

**POSTSCRIPT: "SELF CONDEMNED"
(1954)**

Self Condemned is not a well-made novel but a slow and terrible wind, gathering force for 400 pages, dying to occasional doldrums in whose hush the novelist carries on out of habit, renewing itself from resources beneath the social world, at length blowing all things flat with its oppressive silent force and leaving the hero destroyed in a bleak American sunlight. René Harding exposes himself to this Siberian force by what he considers to be an act of secession from the human conspiracy to pretend that the world is a neutral and often diverting peepshow.

His hunger for the real slightly but fatally contaminated by a thirst for the exhilarations of being in opposition, René resigns his London history professorship because he finds the history he is professing too trivial to arrest an awakened mind, and in the fall of 1939, the lights of Europe going out behind them, sails with his vacuously libidinous wife (a debased Margot Stamp) for Canada.

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The Canadian void in which they find themselves, incarnated in the run-down Room, "twenty-five feet by twelve," in the cockroach-infested Hotel Blundell, where for three years they are virtually imprisoned by lack of money, simply externalizes what René (whose name means "reborn") has come to consider the normal human void. The sun "with a great display of geniality glittering over the frosty backyards," the cold "as impossible to keep out as radium," the light that "seems to bang you in the face as it glares in at the window," the "Yahoo Summer—in contrast to the Indian Summer—" an "indecent explosion of silly heat": all these things epitomize a human ice pack from which grotesque janitors, waitresses and prostitutes detach themselves occasionally to caper through the hotel, in an odd throwback to the effects of *The Wild Body*.

This microcosmic hotel corresponds point for point with the apartment house René and Hester used to inhabit in London. During the Blitz the latter lost its thin façade of gentility—

. . . the cellar was full of dead leaves and a wild cat had established its home there, a brood of wild kittens springing about among the leaves. This wild cat so terrorized the tenants that they dared not go down to their trash bins just outside the cellar door.

The Canadian hotel, correspondingly, is gutted by a spectacular midwinter fire, and transformed into a gigantic hollow iceberg by the firemen's hoses. These melodramatic events parallel a "neuropathic duet" between René and his wife, at the end of which she is dead and he, transformed by metaphorical fire and ice, resembles, be-

POSTSCRIPT

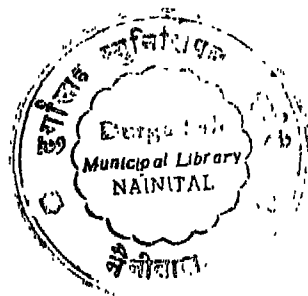
tween occasional uprushes of hysteria, the burnt-out Hotel Blundell: "an enormous cave, full of mighty icicles as much as thirty feet long, and as thick as a tree, suspended from the skeleton of the roof. Below, one looked down into an icy labyrinth: here and there vistas leading the eye on to other caverns: and tunnels ending in mirrors, it seemed. . . . This hollow berg was an unearthly creation, dangerous to enter because so unstable." René, come to terms with New World "success," a behaviorist prolongation of what he had elected to be in London five years earlier, enters again the academic "cemetery of shells." The book ends with his promotion to a great Eastern U. S. campus:

. . . and the Faculty had no idea that it was a glacial shell of a man who had come to live among them, mainly because they were themselves unfilled with anything more than a little academic stuffing.

René is The Enemy of the Stars once more, but the presentation has now a terrible weight of lived authenticity. The "cliffs of cadaverous beaming force" at which Arghol shook his fist in 1914 were by comparison rather romantic "machines of prey," and Arghol wasn't destroyed, he was merely killed. René's doom is more terrible: he becomes the thing he rejected. In *Self Condemned* Lewis steps at last as an artist into that Void beneath the false-bottoms, into which Margot Stamp merely peered, and, electrified by this awful privilege, articulates it from within. The structural backbone of the book, the rendition of two personalities undergoing slow emaciation during three years' hysterical tedium in a cheap hotel room,

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exists with a steely nervous strength that whole chapters of inessential anecdote cannot weaken. The brilliance is never word-deep; this lonely and frightening book is one which, at last, not only could not have been written by anyone else, but which no other English novelist could possibly have conceived.



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ALL THE PICTURES REFERRED TO IN THE TEXT ARE REPRODUCED in Charles Handley-Read's *The Art of Wyndham Lewis* (Faber, London, 1952). This book also contains an invaluable Chronological Outline of Lewis's career, and excellent essays on his painting by Mr. Handley-Read and Eric Newton. Other reproductions may be found in *Rude Assignment, Blasting and Bombardiering, Wyndham Lewis the Artist* (three color plates, including the 1938 Eliot portrait), and the issues of *Blast*, *The Enemy*, and *The Tyro*.

The following chronological list of Lewis's writings contains all his books but only the most important periodical essays. Since they are mostly out of print, I have added descriptive phrases to help the student decide what he wants to look up. The place of publication is London, unless otherwise stated.

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"Some Innkeepers and Bestre," *English Review*, June 1909, pp. 471-484.
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- 1914 *Timon of Athens*, The Cube Press. A folio of twenty drawings.
Blast: Review of the Great English Vortex, No. 1. Edited and largely written by Lewis. Contains the Blasts and Blesses, numerous manifestoes, and the first version of *The Enemy of the Stars*.

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- 1915 *Blast* No. 2. Contains more writings about art, including the long and important "Art Subject to Laws of Life," and a long fragment "The Crowd-Master." The *Blast* material about painting is reprinted, somewhat retouched, in *Wyndham Lewis the Artist* (1939).
- 1917 "Imaginary Letters," *Little Review*, May-June-July 1917, March-April 1918. "The Code of a Herdsman" is the third of these. Other Imaginary Letters were written, partly as a counterblast to Lewis's exaltation of Russian literature, by Ezra Pound, and have been published separately under his name.
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- 1918 "The Ideal Giant," *Little Review*, May 1918, pp. 1-18. A play, reprinted in a pamphlet with "The Code of a Herdsman" and "Cantelman's Spring-Mate," possibly to protect copyright after the suppression of the issue containing the latter story.
- Tarr*, Egoist Press, London; Knopf, New York. The novel was written late in 1914 and serialized in *The Egoist*, April 1916 to November 1917.
- 1919 *The Caliph's Design: Architects! where is your Vortex?*, Egoist Press, London. A retouched version of this pamphlet is included in *Wyndham Lewis the Artist*.
- 1921 *The Tyro*, No. 1, edited by Wyndham Lewis.
- 1922 *The Tyro*, No. 2, edited by Wyndham Lewis. Includes the revised version of "Bestre" (reprinted in *The Wild Body*), and an unfinished "Essay on the Objective of Art in Our Time," reprinted in *Wyndham Lewis the Artist*.
- 1926 *The Art of Being Ruled*, Chatto & Windus, London; Harpers, New York. The germ of all the polemics.

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- 1927 *The Enemy*, No's. 1 and 2, edited and mainly written by Lewis.
The Lion and the Fox, Grant Richards, London; Harpers, New York. A book about Shakespeare and Machiavelli.
Time and Western Man, Chatto Windus, London; Harcourt, Brace, New York. Lewis's major work of nonfiction. The first third is reprinted from *The Enemy*, No. 1.
The Wild Body, Chatto & Windus, London; Harcourt, Brace, New York (1928). Short stories as noted above, plus some others; also "Inferior Religions" and "The Meaning of the Wild Body," an essay explaining Lewis's automaton theory of the comic.
- 1928 *The Childermass*, Part 1, Chatto & Windus, London; Covici Friede, New York. A fantasy containing brilliant passages. The completion of the three remaining parts, *Monstre Gat*, *Malign Fiesta*, and *The Trial of Man*, was announced in 1953; the entire work is to be published by Methuen.
Tarr, heavily revised edition, Chatto & Windus. Reprinted by Methuen, 1952; an American reprint is promised by Regnery.
- 1929 *The Enemy*, No. 3. Edited and largely written by Lewis. *Paleface*, *The Philosophy of the Melting-Pot*, Chatto & Windus. About half of this attack on Lawrence, Anderson, and the cult of the "dark within" appeared in *The Enemy*, No. 2.
- 1930 *The Apes of God*, The Arthur Press. A gargantuan limited edition, most copies of which have broken spines owing to the sheer bulk of the pages. A smaller cheap edition was published by Nash & Grayson in 1932.
Satire and Fiction, The Arthur Press. A pamphlet in defense of *The Apes of God*, centered on Roy Campbell's rejected review. The less topical parts are the basis of a chapter in *Men Without Art*.
- 1931 *The Diabolical Principle and the Dithyrambic Spectator*, Chatto & Windus. A joint attack on the Paris *Transition* group and the school of anthropology that makes art a folk product.

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- Hitler*, Chatto & Windus. The sudden drop in Lewis's stock and his role of outcast throughout the thirties is probably chiefly attributable to this book and *Paleface*.
- 1932 *The Doom of Youth*, Chatto & Windus, London; Robert McBride, New York. The English edition was suppressed. An attack on "youth-politics."
- The Enemy of the Stars*, Desmond Harmsworth. Elaborately revised version, with an appended essay, "Physics of the Not-Self." The *Blast* version is perhaps the more readable.
- Filibusters in Barbary*, Grayson and Grayson, London; Robert McBride, New York. A travel book. English edition suppressed.
- Snooty Baronet*, Cassell. The last automaton fiction.
- Thirty Personalities and a Self-Portrait*, Desmond Harmsworth. A portfolio of pencil drawings.
- 1933 *The Old Gang and the New Gang*, Desmond Harmsworth. A pamphlet written in temporary replacement of the suppressed *Doom of Youth*.
- One-Way Song*, Faber and Faber. Four long poems, midway between fantasy and polemic, with an Envoi.
- 1934 *Men Without Art*, Cassell. Essays on Hemingway, Faulkner, Eliot ("Pseudoist"), and Wyndham Lewis, with supplementary material arguing that Art is on the way out.
- 1936 *Left Wings Over Europe: or How to Make a War About Nothing*, Jonathan Cape. Argues that Hitler is merely a pretext for war desired by "Internationalists" on other grounds.
- The Roaring Queen*, a novel, withdrawn before publication. Harvard University Library possesses a proof copy.
- 1937 *Blasting and Bombardiering*, Eyre and Spottiswoode. Autobiography, 1914-26.
- Count Your Dead: They are Alive!*, Lovat Dickson. A novelized peace pamphlet.
- The Revenge for Love*, Cassell. This, Lewis's best novel, was reprinted by Methuen (London) and Regnery (Chicago) in 1952.

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- 1938 *The Mysterious Mr. Bull*, Robert Hale. A potboiler on the British character.
- 1939 *The Jews, Are They Human?* Allen and Unwin. A discussion of anti-Semitism.
The Hitler Cult, Dent. Hitler as charlatan. This and the previous book were meant to clear up the notion that Lewis's polemic individuality implied any sympathy with organized bloodletting.
Wyndham Lewis the Artist: from Blast to Burlington House, Laidlaw and Laidlaw. Reprints all the writings on art from *Blast* and *The Tyro*, plus *The Caliph's Design*. In eighty pages of new matter Lewis surveys his career as a painter and announces the aesthetic of the 1938 portraits.
- 1940 *America, I Presume*, Howell, Soskin & Co., New York. Impressions of the U.S.; some admirable comic writing.
- 1941 *The Vulgar Streak*, Robert Hale. Copies of this important novel are scarce owing to bombing, and no reprinting has been announced.
- 1942 *Anglosaxony, a League that Works*, Ryerson Press, Toronto.
- 1948 *America and Cosmic Man*, Nicholson and Watson, London: Doubleday, New York. America's promise as a supra-nationalist utopia.
- 1950 *Rude Assignment*, Hutchinson. An important reassessment of his literary career, with emphasis on the polemics. Much autobiographical material.
- 1951 "The Sea-Mists of the Winter," *The Listener*, May 10, 1951, p. 765. On his blindness.
Rotting Hill, Methuen, London; Regnery, Chicago (1952). Sketches and stories of England-as-poorhouse.
- 1952 *The Writer and the Absolute*, Methuen. Sartre, Malraux, Camus, Orwell, and the pressure of politics on letters.
- 1954 *Self Condemned*, Methuen. This semi-autobiographical novel appeared when the present book was in proof.
The Demon of Progress in the Arts, Methuen. Art as the victim of revolution and technology, coerced by them into "daring" extremes which end in an insane zero."

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No attempt has been made to list the very numerous periodical writings which either got into later books or overlapped with them; nor a good deal of journalism, some of it excellent, notably the articles on London art exhibitions written by Lewis for *The Listener* in the period just preceding his blindness. There are indications that other stories of the *Wild Body* series, in addition to those in the *English Review* and *Little Review*, got into print before the 1914 war, but I have not been able to locate them. A complete check-list of Lewis's writings, compiled by Geoffrey Wagnier, has been announced for publication by Peter Russell.

Two books have been written about Lewis: Hugh Gordon Porteus's *Wyndham Lewis, a Discursive Exposition*, Desmond Harmsworth, 1932, and John Gawsorth's *Apes, Japes and Hitlerism*, Unicorn Press, 1932. An issue of *Twentieth Century Verse* (London) was devoted to articles about Lewis (Nov./Dec. 1937). The Wyndham Lewis issue of *Shenandoah* (Lexington, Virginia, Summer 1953) contains, in addition to articles about him, a new story by Lewis, "The Rebellious Patient."

Most of the following biographical dates are taken from Mr. Handley-Read's Chronological Outline:

1884, Wyndham Lewis born. 1897-1901, Rugby School and Slade School of Art. 1902-8, France, Germany, Holland, and Spain; summers in Brittany. "Paris was my University," Lewis has written. 1909, return to England.

1914, *Blast*, writing of *Tarr*. 1915-19, army service, first bombardier, then war artist.

1922-26, period of semi-retirement and incubation, ending with the General Strike.

1927-32, major polemics and automaton fiction.

1932-36, intermittent illness; much work, culminating in *The Revenge for Love*.

1936-39, antiwar books.

1940-48, long visit to Canada and the United States.

1951, failure of sight.

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